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Head on Fire

*Frances
Fenwick
Williams*





MSA

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William

A SOUL ON FIRE

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

**THE
ARCH-SATIRIST**

"We trust we may see more of the author's work, for there is much wit and a great deal of humour to be found in this book."—*New York Evening Post*.

A SOUL ON FIRE

BY
FRANCES FENWICK WILLIAMS

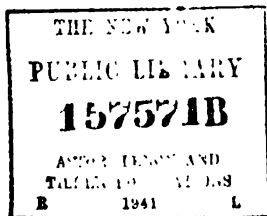
*"And hell the shadow from a
soul on fire."*

THE RUBAIYAT

NEW YORK: JOHN LANE COMPANY
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CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. NETS?	9
II. AND BESIDES —	22
III. ARCH TRAITOR TO MYSELF	30
IV. RELATIVES	38
V. THE TROUBLE WITH MOST WOMEN	54
VI. APOSTOLIC BLOWS AND KNOCKS	74
VII. IF THOUGHT CAN REACH	90
VIII. "IF THERE WERE ONLY!"	98
IX. WHERE YOU EASED PAIN	110
X. THE "RIBS" CONVERSE	121
XI. TRYST WITH DARKNESS	133
XII. ONCE-SOWN SEED	146
XIII. REAPING THE WHIRLWIND	158
XIV. SOME HEART DID BREAK	173
XV. BRAWLING JUDGMENTS	193
XVI. THE SECRETS OF THE DEAD	206
XVII. THE MOTHER	217
XVIII. POWERS OF DARKNESS	222

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CHAPTER	PAGE
XIX. LIFE FOR LIFE	232
XX. THE TIGER'S SPRING	240
XXI. LOVE'S LAST REWARD	260
XXII. FULL CIRCLE	282
XXIII. THE GREAT GULF	291
XXIV. A FLOOD OF LIGHT	306

A SOUL ON FIRE

A SOUL ON FIRE

CHAPTER I

NETS?

"Young ladies are clever at making nets but not at making cages."—DEAN SWIFT.

THE blaze and glory of a leaping, whistling fire; the purr of a huge happy cat; the gleam of a silver-laden tea-table. In the midst of the comfort and the brightness Abernethy L. Bilkins and Joanna, his wife. Mr. Bilkins was buried in a newspaper; Mrs. Bilkins was enjoying an execrable cup of tea; and Mrs. Amherst, their visitor, was enjoying her.

Mrs. Bilkins was one of those enviable people whom everybody laughs at and tries to get introduced to. In her youth she had possessed a considerable fortune and a total imperviousness to snubs; therefore, in her middle age, she occupied a fairly important position in Montreal society and knew only "the very best" people. As her great-grandmother had been a washerwoman she was naturally very exclusive and looked with horror upon "climbers"; by which pleasing title she designated all who like herself wished to know the people who did not wish to know them.

Apart from industriously insulting those who were not on her visiting list and unmercifully bullying her husband, she was a kind-hearted woman and gave liberally to charities even when her name was not certain to be published in the evening papers. Also she really loved her cat.

Furthermore, Mrs. Bilkins had once been a beauty and allowed no one to forget the fact. She dressed all the time in the way in which a duchess dresses on state occasions; she audibly pitied the "plain" and wondered publicly how their mothers had ever managed to "marry them off"; and she alluded frequently and admiringly to "abundant golden hair" and "sparkling white teeth," which hair and teeth, one gathered, had formed part of her equipment in earlier days, though no vestige of either remained to testify to the truth of her statement.

Lynn Amherst may be dismissed in four words: she possessed a plain face, a good figure, a keen sense of humour, and an admirable husband. As one of her mother's cousins was an English peer and as Mr. Bilkins was distantly related to her father, Mrs. Bilkins always insisted that she and her husband be addressed by Lynn as "Aunt Joanna" and "Uncle Abernethy." Mrs. Hadwell, Mrs. Amherst's most intimate friend, strongly objected to this, urging the undeniable fact that Lynn was already amply supplied with objectionable relatives; but the custom obtained, nevertheless.

"You need not stand gaping there, Perkins," observed Mrs. Bilkins tartly as a silent individual in a

white coat entered with a muffin dish, placed it on the tea-table, and stood awaiting further orders. "If I want you I shall ring. Be off!"

Mrs. Bilkins believed that it was the first duty of a good housekeeper to insult her dependants, and lived up to her convictions.

Perkins gently withdrew, making an unbecoming face as he closed the door. He shook in his shoes when his mistress addressed him; but in the privacy of his pantry he had been known to make some nasty remarks about her.

"Now," said Mrs. Bilkins comfortably, "we can talk." She provided her husband with a cold cup of tea, which he proceeded to gulp down meekly, and desired him to "go on reading" as Lynn "would not mind." Then, lowering her voice in a way that made it piercingly audible, she proceeded to unbosom herself of a "secret."

"Of course, my dear, this is quite confidential," she said impressively as she finished. "It was only told me in the strictest secrecy because Mrs. Hill knows that I am absolutely to be trusted; and the chief reason that I am telling you is that I know you are trustworthy also." She paused and looked complimentary.

"Thank you," said Mrs. Amherst gravely.

"Another reason is that although it is a secret everybody knows it. So I really don't see why you should be left out in the cold."

"Nor I."

"If," exclaimed Mr. Bilkins, looking up from his

paper with sudden interest, "if, Joanna, it is a secret how is it that ev——"

"Oh, are you there, Abernethy? Dear me! I quite forgot you. Why, you must have heard the secret. How dishonourable of you! No, don't interrupt me!" as Mr. Bilkins made feeble but strenuous efforts to speak, "please don't interrupt me again. I so seldom see Lynn and how can I ever tell her anything if you persist in breaking into the conversation with irrelevant questions? How do I know how anybody knows anything? All I know is that I am silent as the grave myself and that is enough for me. Abernethy, please be silent till I finish. It really does seem as though I might be permitted to make a remark occasionally without interruption."

A "friend" of Mrs. Bilkins had once been appealed to as to whether the latter had not an uneven temper. The "friend" had replied that, on the contrary, Mrs. Bilkins had one of the most even tempers imaginable, as she—Mrs. Bilkins—was always exactly the same. The reader is at liberty to draw what conclusions he pleases from these remarks while Mrs. Bilkins finishes her peroration.

"It really does seem as though I might be permitted to make a remark occasionally without interruption. What I was going to say was that when a gentleman overhears a conversation which was not intended for his ears the least he can do is to keep silent; and I hope you will remember that, Abernethy, and not go talking all over the place about it at your horrid bridge clubs and things. Now don't tell me

that you never talk at bridge because I have heard that before; what does it matter whether you talk at bridge or not when you talk whenever you stop for a drink, which is all the time. Besides, you must talk when you are dummy; everybody does. Dear me, Abernethy! what is it you are trying to say? Do get it out and be done with it. You make me nervous, fidgeting and spluttering like that!"

"I only wanted to say," stammered Mr. Bilkins hastily, "that——"

"Well?"

"That," almost shrieked Mr. Bilkins, "that I can't tell the secret because I don't know it. I didn't hear it."

"Abernethy!" said Mrs. Bilkins, very gravely.

"Upon my word, Joanna, this is too much. Do you suppose I would tell an untruth about the thing? I tell you I didn't hear a word of the infer—that is to say, of the secret! And let that be an end of it!"

"But you were sitting there all the time reading your paper. How could you help hearing it?"

"I didn't hear it," said Mr. Bilkins desperately.

"Well, it doesn't make much difference anyway, because everybody knows it. It was just that——"

"But I don't want to know it."

"Nonsense! Of course you want to know it. You are only trying to be disagreeable because I reproved you for eavesdropping. Never mind, Abernethy! It is natural to want to listen when you know that people don't want you to. But, now, it seems, you say you didn't listen. Well, it was just that——"

Mr. Bilkins rattled his paper vigorously.

"Abernethy! Please put that paper down when your wife is addressing you," observed Mrs. Bilkins with dignity. "And try to show a little interest in what I am saying. Of course, I know that I am no longer so young as I used to be, and——"

Mr. Bilkins glanced up apprehensively.

"And of course I cannot expect to receive the same consideration that I did when——"

"What did you say the secret was, Joanna?" inquired Mr. Bilkins with an air of ghastly excitement.

"When my hair was golden and abundant and my teeth——"

"Had it anything to do with eggs?" shrieked Mr. Bilkins.

"Eggs!" exclaimed Mrs. Bilkins, dropping the subject of her golden and abundant hair and teeth abruptly. "Eggs, Abernethy! Did I ever hear anything so ridiculous as that! What in the world made you connect Theodora Carne with eggs?"

"Eggs!" muttered Mr. Bilkins in stupefaction, "Theodora Carne! Eggs! Theo——"

"—dora Carne. Theodora Carne! Now you are not going to try to tell me that you don't know who she is, are you?"

"Why no," said Mr. Bilkins cautiously. "She is the handsome English girl who is staying at Mrs. Waite's this winter——" He paused tentatively.

"And no doubt," he went on, gaining courage, "no doubt, Joanna, the secret concerns her."

"There!" said Mrs. Bilkins triumphantly, "I knew

you had been listening. How else could you possibly know that we had been talking about Theodora Carne? Now don't waste time making excuses which deceive nobody, but listen! Not only has that girl had five offers since she came to Montreal—two months ago, but——” she paused dramatically,—“but, Abernethy, Dick Herrod himself has proposed to her.”

There was a short silence.

“I don't believe it,” said Mr. Bilkins.

“Oh, but it's true. I had it on the very best authority.”

“Still I can't think it's true.”

“Why not?”

“Why—why, Herrod's not a marrying man.”

“As if that had anything to do with it!” muttered Mrs. Bilkins scornfully.

“Not a marrying man!” repeated Mr. Bilkins conclusively, “I appeal to you, Lynn, my dear. Does Herrod look to you like a marrying man?”

“He does not,” answered Mrs. Amherst. “He looks to me more like a man who lived in daily terror of being some day chloroformed and dragged unconscious to the altar.”

“Oh, a little management is all that is needed in such cases!” commented Mrs. Bilkins comfortably. “Dear me, Lynn, what a lot of long words you do know! I never can remember any. Ah, well, we all have our own fortes. Mine is housekeeping.”

Lynn opened her mouth, then shut it again. Mrs. Bilkins' housekeeping consisted in making everybody beneath her roof as uncomfortable as possible, re-

gardless of cost. Lynn's consisted in making her home a haven of beauty and comfort and saying nothing about it. However, Lynn never talked servants or the price of beef, and Mrs. Bilkins talked of little else. So the latter certainly fulfilled the popular idea of a good housekeeper better than the former.

"But to return to Miss Carne!" went on Mrs. Bilkins briskly. "Isn't she a wonderful girl? Six offers already in this short time, and Dick Herrod the sixth! How delightful to have such a daughter!" Mrs. Bilkins' voice waxed pious. "She must be a source of constant gratification to her widowed mother! And Herrod, for such a young man, is positively rich. In addition to that large private income they say he is making money hand over fist. Ah, well!" Mrs. Bilkins sighed enviously,—“there is something distinctly vulgar about extreme wealth. Still, it must be nice to have it. And I believe that Miss Carne has money of her own, which makes it all the more disgraceful of her to be mercenary—if she is! Though the more you have the more you want, I believe. Never having had much,” Mrs. Bilkins continued, raising her voice and gazing severely at Mr. Bilkins, “never having had much, I can't say! But in any case it does seem wicked for a girl like that with money not to leave a good catch like Herrod for some one who really needed him. Though no girl in her senses could be expected to refuse Dick Herrod. What in the world are you moving your mouth for in that queer way, Lynn Amherst?”

Lynn jumped guiltily and laughed. She had been

trying to tabulate the contradictions in Mrs. Bilkins' speech, but had lost count.

"After all," she suggested, "we don't know yet that she has accepted him!"

"What?" exclaimed her host and hostess simultaneously.

"Why," gasped Mrs. Bilkins, "there's hardly a better match in town than Dick Herrod, unless you count young Norris, who has delirium tremens and isn't expected to live!"

"And," added Mr. Bilkins slyly, "I can hardly picture a young lady refusing a bona fide offer now-a-days, when the cost of living is so high and men fight so shy of matrimony. It's all very well to talk of six offers," he smiled profoundly, "but what I want to know is why if this girl has received even one offer she hasn't accepted it?" He propounded this conundrum with an air of triumph, but was promptly extinguished by his wife.

"Nonsense, Abernethy!" she trumpeted. "What do you know of such things? Read your paper! Well, Lynn, I'm sure it's very nice to think of any girl getting so much attention, even if one hardly knows her. How I should love to meet her face to face; I've never seen her near to and she was out when I called. And the best of it is that she can only marry one man in the end, so that no poor girl need be deprived of a husband simply because Miss Carne happens to be fascinating. It is such things as these that make me believe in an overruling Providence that makes for—
for——"

"Providing the needy with husbands?"

"Nonsense, Lynn! Don't be so silly. I suppose you think that is funny."

"Well, do tell me about some of Miss Carne's other suitors."

"Let me see. There was Martin Aubrey."

"Oh, I know him. Rather small, isn't he, and very dapper?"

"And very well-to-do," said Mrs. Bilkins impressively. "A good match if it hadn't been for Herrod's being a better one."

"And then Herrod's so good-looking."

"Well, Lynn! What queer thing will you say next? As if it mattered to any Christian girl what her husband looked like, provided he could give her a good home!"

"Who else, Aunt Joanna? I'm quite interested. It's like a serial novel."

"There was Brand."

"Horace Brand? I know him too. He is supposed to be rather fast, isn't he, and not very desirable?"

"Not very desirable!" exclaimed Mr. Bilkins, dropping his newspaper. "Why, he's one of the finest fellows going. Plays as good a game of billiards as any man in town; and as for golf—a fine fellow!"

Lynn surveyed him with interest, pondering on the strange but undeniable fact that a man's definition of a fine fellow is usually one who can eat a lot and drink a lot and kick a football.

"Are there any more?" she said aloud. "I must be going."

"Oh, the others didn't amount to much," said Mrs. Bilkins kindly. "Dan Rolfe with fifteen hundred a year which he spent on cigars and whisky, and some young clergyman with twelve hundred a year which he spent on the poor. Then there was Severn Light. But some say that he didn't really propose," went on Mrs. Bilkins, lowering her voice mysteriously. "Some say that—he couldn't."

"Why not?"

"Some say that he has fits——"

"Poor thing!"

"And others that he has a wife."

"I judge that this doubly afflicted being was not in the running anyway."

"Not with Herrod and Aubrey, oh, no. But he was rather better than the curate or the other one. Well, Lynn, it's wonderful to think how the world's changing. Only a few years ago and Amy Waite was a poor unknown creature, the widow of another poor unknown creature, and housekeeper to Del Hadwell. And the only thing about that that really surprised anyone was that she was a widow and so must have been a wife. We had to believe in her husband because she had actually had him; but when it came to that dear, delightful General Shaftan who did so distinguish himself—why who could ever have believed it? But it must have been so, or why should he leave her his money? And as soon as he left it all sorts of things seemed to turn up about her. First we found that she really belonged to a very old family in England. Of course, her father was the black

sheep of the family and emigrated to Canada and married beneath him, as black sheep are so apt to do—what in the world are you laughing at, Lynn?—still, nothing could alter the fact that he *was* of a very good old family; and so of course his daughter is too. Then in some peculiar way,” Mrs. Bilkins spoke with veiled suspicion, “in some peculiar way this money that the General left seemed to multiply itself——”

“Why, there was nothing peculiar about that. She invested it judiciously from time to time, and this being a good time for people with ready money she made a great deal. Lots of others have done the same.”

“Ah, but they were men,” explained Mrs. Bilkins, who in spite of her unconcealed contempt for her mate was unable to shake off a vague belief in the greatness of the male sex as a sex. “They were men. That’s altogether different. Say what you like, there was something very peculiar in the way in which Mrs. Waite became so rich. But you never will hear a word against her, Lynn, so I shall say no more. Only it does seem so odd. She was unknown all her life; then she got money and position; and then we hear that her cousin’s or rather her second cousin’s wife and daughter have come to visit her. And anyone can see what *they* are!”

“I have never met them,” exclaimed Lynn with interest. “I have seen Miss Carne only in the distance. How amazingly beautiful she is!”

“She is a good deal more than beautiful,” said Mrs.

Bilkins solemnly. "Six of——well, what is it, Perkins?"

"—'sscarneterseeerm'm," murmured Perkins from the doorway in tones of purling velvet.

"Well, doesn't that just seem like Fate!" demanded Mrs. Bilkins in astonishment. "How do you do, Miss Carne."

CHAPTER II

AND BESIDES——

“—— and anyway he is much too good for you, and besides Eva Holt would jump at him.”

“Let her jump!”

“Oh! The girl has no natural womanly instincts!” ejaculated her aunt despairingly.

“The Arch-Satirist.”

—F. F. W.

THEODORA CARNE stepped into the delicious, invigorating cold of the December night and glided through the crowded streets. The early sun had long since set; a thousand lights gleamed on the dark hills that crowned the city; a million stars glittered in the frosty sky. As she walked, she inhaled the sharp air with delight; the crystal Canadian air that creeps subtly into the blood and reddens it. The yellow glare of the electric lights illumined the faces of the passers-by; faces sad and radiant, careless and care-worn. Among them Theodora Carne passed as the sunbeams dance or the leaves whirl; with the same lightness, the same unconscious agility, the same unvarying grace. The soft grey furs in which she was clad, combined with this silent suppleness of movement, gave her somewhat the appearance of a slim, grey panther speeding through the woods. So at

least thought Mr. Richard Herrod when he first caught sight of her. She was beautiful, he reflected, not with that graceful prettiness so common to Canadian girls which withers like flowers in the sun; but with a rich physical development of which noble outlines and radiant colouring seemed but the accidental expression.

Mrs. Amherst had described Mr. Herrod not long before as a man who looked as if he lived in daily terror of being some day chloroformed and dragged unconscious to the altar. The description was apt. The gentleman in question was haunted by a vague yet fairly positive impression that his bachelorhood was a rare and priceless possession of which the whole created world of unmarried females lay in wait to rob him. The really sad thing about this belief of Mr. Herrod's was that, like some historical romances, it was "remotely founded on fact." He was an exceptionally handsome man, with a face and bearing which caused some men and many women to follow him with their eyes. His money made him important and his appearance laid him open to attentions which he by no means desired. For Mr. Herrod was no "marrying man"; he earnestly desired to keep that goodly heritage, his bachelorhood, intact; he knew well that every woman who was not possessed of a husband was constantly planning for one—with what diabolical success the society columns nightly testified!—and he realised that no amiable and defenceless young man should run too many risks in the vicinity of such a being.

Lynn Amherst sometimes said that one of the greatest blessings of matrimony lay in the fact that one was not obliged to dissemble the natural kindliness of one's disposition in order to prove to men that one did not want to marry them. But then Lynn, as her Aunt Joanna often remarked, was far too ready with her tongue.

"Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty." So felt Mr. Herrod; and so has felt many a gallant bachelor before him. But, when the hour of doom strikes, who shall gainsay it? It had struck for Mr. Herrod; and he had proffered his valuable hand and heart to a girl whom he had known barely six weeks.

Perhaps, however, after this brief foreword, the reader will understand why Mr. Herrod had not been in the least dismayed or discouraged by the prompt though polite refusal which Theodora had accorded him. True, if one were to believe the girl, she cared nothing for him; but, then, why should one believe a girl when she told one anything so improbable? Besides, even if she told the truth, what then? All women have their moments of yielding; and Mr. Herrod believed firmly that his immediate vicinity was the place of all others where one of these moments was most likely to occur. This belief is common to the male sex; but Mr. Herrod really did possess, in some measure, that overpowering fascination with which every normal man feels himself imbued.

Therefore, though temporarily occupying the rôle of rejected lover, he strode blithely enough to Theodora's side, and greeted her with an enthusiasm which

held no note of embarrassment. How fortunate, he said, that he should happen to run across her. Had she had tea or——

“Yes, thank you.”

“Oh! Been calling somewhere, I suppose!”

“Yes. At Mrs. Bilkins’.”

“Oh! Mrs. Bilkins!”

Dick Herrod laughed, as everyone did when Mrs. Bilkins’ name was mentioned.

“Rum old girl, isn’t she? Great fun, though! It’s as good as a play to hear her rake her husband over the coals. She knows everyone in town, that woman; but I can remember when her father——”

He stopped without knowing why. Something about his companion discouraged gossip. Miss Carne gave a sigh of relief. She had noticed that whenever any of Montreal’s social lights were mentioned some one was sure to bound in with a spirited anecdote of how their fathers used to shovel coal or of how their mothers used to take in washing. It was beginning to get wearisome, especially as she knew that all the members of what the servants called the “smart set” were not directly descended from scullery maids.

“I met a Mrs. Amherst there,” she observed.

“Oh, did you? Nice woman, isn’t she? Awfully popular. There was a queer story about her a while ago—something about a half brother who went to the bad and died in California. Ever hear about it?”

“No.”

“Well, it’s nothing much. All to her credit, what there is. They say she nearly went mad with grief

and all that, you know; but I don't believe a word of it myself. She's not a person of much feeling; just a regular good sort, full of jokes and funny stories."

Theodora surveyed him in silence. She knew more of her species than did her handsome companion, and therefore did not share in the common belief that a melancholy person is apt to possess greater capacity for feeling than a cheerful one. She knew well that the brightest people are usually the bravest; that those who refuse to sink beneath the sea of this world's sorrow are made of sterner stuff than those who are drowned in it; she also knew better than to argue with a young man: so she walked by his side in silence.

"I like her better than her friend, that little Mrs. Hadwell. She's bright too—Mrs. Hadwell!—but she's a bit malicious. Knows how to dress, though——"

Dick's voice rambled off into nothingness. He flushed angrily in sheer helpless rage with himself. What possessed him to maunder like this? When making his way to Miss Carne's side he had been positively brimming over with clever quips and telling anecdotes. Now his brain seemed a vacuum. What an ass he was!

He looked hopelessly at his companion. How beautiful! Beauty seemed part of her blood. One could not imagine her old or sick or withered. She seemed full of the inextinguishable fire of life.

"Theodora!" he said in a different voice.

Theodora turned and looked at him absently. Her

full enchanting gaze carried him from the Canadian cold to far strange climes where oranges ripened in the sun and white-clad slaves waved fans. In spite of her red hair and the rose-like fairness of her skin, one never thought of Miss Carne as a blonde. There was something distinctively oriental in the shape of her full, dark eyes, in the slow grace of her long, unhurried movements.

"Well?" she said; and suddenly her vague eyes widened and smiled at him.

Theodora did not wish to marry Herrod. She did not even consciously wish to encourage him. But those who have power have usually the instinct to use it. An orator moves audiences because he can. A dog hunts rats because he can. A financier makes millions because he can. So this silent brooding woman fascinated because she could. Not because she wished to cause misery nor yet to give joy; simply because the blind elemental instinct within her caused her to put forth fascination as a fish puts forth fins.

Dick Herrod spoke breathlessly.

"Theodora, you know—you know what I want to say."

It was a statement of fact, not a question. Theodora of course knew what he wanted to say. She would have known even had she not heard it already. For centuries—thousands of years—she had listened to such pleadings; or so it seemed to her. At least for thousands of years those beings who had created her, some of whose essence had entered into her blood, had listened as she listened now.

Suddenly the force which had drawn her companion to her side, which had temporarily deprived him of coherent speech, endowed him with fluency. He burst into words. The ancient emotional lies which are as the soul of truth to him who voices them poured from his lips. For how many æons has Woman listened to the same outpourings? Humanity is curiously repetitive.

Theodora's great eyes grew luminous with thought as she listened. She looked as though she were pondering the problem of eternity; in reality she was reflecting that all men proposed in much the same way.

"Mr. Light varied it by asking me to call him Severn," she mused. "Generally they call you something without asking. But, otherwise——"

"—and I shall cut my throat if you won't have me. I shall——"

"Oh no," observed Theodora soothingly. She was not disturbed by the threat which she had heard before from others. "Please speak a little more quietly. People are beginning to notice us."

She looked pityingly at his handsome, haggard face. Then something crept into her eyes which was not pity—something cruel, weary, and mocking. She turned her head away and stared listlessly at the distant hills.

"Are you in earnest?" inquired Mr. Herrod unbelievably. "Do you really mean it? Do you really mean that you will never——"

"Cab, sir?"

"No, confound you! That is—I mean—I beg your

pardon, Miss Carne,—get away, you brute!—my man, I mean! we don't want a cab just now."

The cabman, who had been inciting his aged horse to strange and fearsome gambollings, grunted disgustedly as he looked at the young couple and allowed his minion to cease from prancing. The weird-looking animal, thin at every point where he should have been thick, and thick at every point where he should have been thin, accepted the relief thankfully and plodded along at his normal gait; while his master sent a roving eye about the street in search of fresh prey. Catching sight of a thin woman loaded with parcels, he advanced and inquired in tones of silver, "Cab, ma'am?" but he did not urge Dobbin to fresh gambols. He had been driving women for upwards of thirty years; but all the manoeuvres of which his combined horses had been capable had never gained him an extra quarter from a person of this sex. Accordingly, he held a poor opinion of the sex as a sex, and had been heard in moments of depression to give vent to the heretical opinion that "one man was worth the whole boilin' on 'em."

CHAPTER III

ARCH TRAITOR TO MYSELF

"Myself, arch traitor to myself,
My cruellest friend, my deadliest foe,
My clog, my curse, where'er I go."

—KING LEAR.

MEANWHILE Miss Carne and her escort walked quickly on, Herrod silent with unwonted feeling, Theodora unmoved in her mysterious calm and the peculiar pallor which the cruellest cold never heightened to a flush. Dick looked at her once or twice almost uneasily. He was very much in love; nevertheless, he felt a certain chill when in Theodora's presence which he could not analyse and which he wanted very much to understand.

Some people attract incident. If they go out to buy a spool of thread they meet a prince in disguise or witness a murder. Theodora was one of these. She had only taken a walk at five in a city street, yet had already received a proposal and was about to receive what would have been a shock had not Theodora been Theodora.

A sudden tumult in an adjacent quarter, confused shoutings, sharp cries of fright, hysterical wailings and tramlings; all announced some disturbance. As

Theodora and Herrod, stopping short, glanced up the street, the cause of the disturbance showed itself. A huge dog, uncouth, menacing, with foaming jaws and red-shot eyes, darted howling through the crowd.

If this dog in its madness had been the occasion of an unspeakable death to many, poetic justice would but have been served. For, for many days, its melancholy cries and tormented glances and dumb appeals for food and drink had passed unheeded by the Christian dwellers in this Christian land. Till at last merciful madness had overtaken it and made it a menace to its murderers.

Its murderers at the horror of it had reverted to savagery and were displaying the emotions of the jungle; those emotions of tooth and claw which Humanity disguises so nicely till some brute Reality makes it shed the shams. They did not dare to attack it; so they attacked one another, fighting and clawing and tearing a way for themselves from out the path of the menace. A group of policemen, hastily summoned, stood well to one side, showing their valour by fiercely hitting out at anyone who looked too meek and inoffensive to hit them back. As the dog advanced the snowheaps to the side became the refuge of scrambling, screaming humans. Herrod, clutching Theodora's hand, tried to pull her behind one. She shook him off and without a word glided to the centre of the street. Her red mouth looked a little cruel; her deep eyes were slumberous like cloudy ink-wells, and half-closed. There was something in her look which was fixed and watchful and

dangerous like a tiger about to spring. As her still wicked eyes fell on the bounding dog he stopped and cowed, cringing and panting, at her foot. Her clear voice cut the frosty air like a knife.

"Destroy the dog!"

Hardly had she spoken than a man stepped forward, pistol in hand. While the girl stared steadily into the distended monstrous eyes, he took careful aim, and the beast with one last anguished howl rolled over, dead.

Theodora drew a long breath and stood upright. A low moan of amazement ran through the crowd, followed by a sort of hum of relief and applause. She did not hear it. She was looking at the man who had killed the dog.

This man had not the athletic beauty of Dick Herrod. Yet he was a fine specimen of the healthy, forceful Anglo-Saxon. His hair, which was close-cropped and wiry, was fair; his eyes, a keen bright blue, were the eyes of an observer; his features were straight and clean-cut as though carved with a knife. Much exercise in the sun and wind had tanned his naturally fair skin to a sort of golden bronze colour and hardened his muscles till they resembled knots of steel. He inclined towards the manly defect of leanness, yet was powerfully built. As a whole his face was a pleasing one, thoughtful, kindly, intelligent; yet with a certain curve of the tight-shut lips and a certain proud light in the eye which warned the close observer not to presume too far upon the kindness.

The splendour of the beauty before him, so vivid,

so vital, held him silent for a moment. Then, stepping forward, he congratulated the strange saviour in a courtly though formal manner on her self-possession and skill. Like many people of unbending will and overbearing temper, he was low-voiced and suave of manner save when he saw reason to be otherwise.

"Let me introduce myself," he begged. "I am Dr. Hale—Edward Hale. May I call a sleigh and see that you reach home safely and are none the worse for your exploit? You will be overwhelmed with attentions in a moment, just as soon as our good friends here get their several breaths, and I know you will want to escape."

Richard Herrod hurried forward, unable to contain himself for wrath and heartily hating the man who had ousted him from the rôle of hero. Had Herrod possessed a pistol he too could have despatched the dog. In the crises of life, however, one man only holds the pistol, as a rule, and to him accrue the praises and the laurels. Most of us are supers on the stage of life; we do not rise to the dignity of a speaking part; only fill in nicely as part of a mob. Herrod, who had reigned in women's hearts for twenty-eight years, had just been reduced to part of a mob in the eyes which he most wished to dazzle; and he found himself hating the actor with the speaking part more than he had ever hated another human being.

"Let me take you out of all this," he said harshly, putting his hand on Miss Carne's arm with a proprietary gesture.

"Oh, pardon me," said Dr. Hale, "I did not know that you had an escort. But if I can't do anything for you just now I hope—I hope that—that you—that I—in short, I am sure that under the circumstances you will let me call and ascertain that you are none the worse for your adventure."

Theodora quietly assented and gave him her card. Then she turned and moved through the chattering, whispering, gathering mob like a grey serpent, Herrod following closely behind. Something about the young woman chilled the admiration which her deed had excited in the minds of those who had witnessed it; and she escaped the public tributes that she dreaded. As her shadowy fathomless eyes rested on the bystanders they dispersed involuntarily, and made way for her to pass. One, however, pressed forward and, regardless of spectators, grasped her hand and shook it warmly. He was a man of about sixty, garbed as an Anglican priest. His features were nobly chiselled, his expression calm and benign. Among the paltry, the feeble, the wicked, his face stood out by reason of its strength and goodness. Theodora's reserve seemed to melt beneath his kindly regard; she even smiled at him, and the black-fringed eyes which had gleamed like fires in a cavern a few moments before softened and became human.

"You are a very brave girl," he said in a voice which was rich and musical. "You must let me thank you in all our names for your self-possession and skill. I don't know how you did it. I suppose you have some hypnotic faculty—some power——"

"I suppose," said Theodora reluctantly, "that I have some power over animals. I have always known that they had to obey me even if they hated to——" She stopped. The clergyman nodded as though in understanding.

"Yes. There have always been people with that power, that gift, in every century," he said conclusively. "There have been horse tamers and dog tamers,—and once in a while we even find records of a man tamer," he added, with a twinkle in his eye. "However, that's neither here nor there. What I want to say now is that our acquaintance must not end here. You know who I am, perhaps—Father Munn, of St. Catharine's? I want to call and see a little of you. Where are you staying? For you are a stranger here, are you not?"

"Yes. I am staying with my cousin, Mrs. Waite."

"Mrs. Waite?" Father Munn's face brightened. "I know her well. She is a power in Montreal—though everyone doesn't know it. Well, good-evening, then; I shall hope to see you soon again; and I shall hope to find you none the worse for your exploit. Good-evening."

Had Mr. Herrod and Miss Carne succeeded in reaching Mrs. Waite's home without fresh adventure, the course of my story and of their two lives would have been altered. But the offer of Mr. Herrod's hand and heart and the quelling of the mad dog had not satisfied the God of Destiny—who has a tail! His emissary, Mr. Michael O'Callaghan, advanced toward them.

Mr. O'Callaghan was a soldier of fortune who eked out a precarious livelihood by ill-treating furnaces in the homes of the simple-minded. His methods were simple: he put coal on the furnaces; if they stayed in credit attached to him; if they went out blame attached to the furnaces. Owing to the fact that the majority of people know even less about furnaces than Mr. O'Callaghan, the latter possessed a fair number of clients. It was while on the way to one of these that he met with an accident.

A small boy, fired by an ambition to outshine his companions in deeds of derring-do, watched his chance and pouncing from a dark corner grabbed Michael's right leg with such force that our hero described a parabola on the icy pavement. When he regained his feet the small boy had disappeared. Now Mr. O'Callaghan possessed a temper which rivalled the wasp's in sweetness, and a tongue which the coldest Canadian weather could not freeze. He began to express his thoughts.

At this inauspicious moment Mr. Herrod and Miss Carne approached.

Profanity is disgusting and an angry man a repellent sight. Dick Herrod had seen nothing in Theodora, however, to prepare him for the effect which the sight of the Irishman produced. Her eyes dilated with terror; her form stiffened as though to repel an attack; she cast a wild glance backward, as though meditating flight.

"Take me away!" she breathed faintly, clutching Herrod's arm.

A fresh volley of language greeted them. Herrod sprang forward angrily.

"Get out of this!" he cried. "Can't you see that you are frightening the lady——"

He stopped. Theodora, who had just quelled a mad dog and governed a mob by a glance of her eyes; Theodora, the proud, the strong; Theodora, with a sudden dreadful cry, fell unconscious to the ground.

CHAPTER IV

RELATIVES

"God sends us our friends; the Devil, our relatives!"—ANON.

(Being a letter from Mrs. Henry Hadwell, Hadwell Heights, Montreal, to Miss Joan Cadding, Paris.)

"My dear Joan:

"When are you coming home? Lynn and I were speaking of you only the other day. You would enjoy Montreal this winter. I do. But, then, I am so queer; I always enjoy everything. Sometimes I think I must be the most eccentric person living; everyone else seems so unhappy and doleful most of the time.

"Well, what shall I tell you first? The Edgar Brocks are giving a big dinner next Thursday in honour of the ——'s and of Lord Haviland, who is staying with them—with the ex-Vice-Regals, I mean. They are in town this week, as I suppose you have seen by the papers, which no doubt you get. It will be a good dinner, I think; the Brocks' food is always delicious, and there are several interesting people in town. One is a German scientist by the name of Schmidt. Despite his cognomen, they say he is awfully interesting once you get him to talk. He has been in the East, has dabbled in various sorts of oc-

cultism, and they say there is no end to the queer things he knows. But then I'm not interested in that sort of thing, are you? This world is enough for me. I like plenty to eat and a warm house and my husband and my children. Lynn gets so indignant when I say that. She says that every human being with a mind and a heart should want more than that and insist on having it and insist on looking out for those who have not got it. But I am, as you know, consistently selfish and as long as I have a happy home I don't really care about outsiders. The laws respecting women here that they are all making such a fuss about never hurt me, so why should I try to get a vote in order to help other people? Henry said that I was an ideal wife and mother when I told him that. So you see! The more callous and selfish you are the better men like you. I had a sort of revulsion of feeling when he said that and warned him solemnly not to make many such speeches or he would drive me to join the Suffragists; and he did look so amazed and perplexed. He is a dear old stupid; and we do get on together so beautifully until I am foolish enough to forget that he is a man and attempt to treat him as if he were a reasoning being. But there! don't let us get on Woman Suffrage! I am so sick of the subject. Half the women in town are daft about it and as one can never answer any of their arguments I simply refuse to talk at all. Much the best plan!

"But there are worse things than Suffragists. I went to the most awful tea yesterday. It was at Henry's Aunt Josephine's, and all the other relatives were

there, and they all sat round in a circle and said what they really thought of me. I think that people who say what they really think of you should be banished to a desert island and made to talk to one another. Oh yes, and they all told me they did it for my good and called me 'dear'! Among the things they told me for my good were that I was flighty and frivolous and lazy and a bad housekeeper and an unsatisfactory wife and a neglectful mother. There was quite a lot more but I forget it. Also, that I would improve as I got older. I didn't mind the rest so much, but think of being told that I would improve when I know what they meant by improve—get like them! I nearly swooned with horror! Then they said that they didn't want to be personal but I was getting fat. No one but a relative *could* have told me a thing like that. Not a cannibal nor a sneak thief nor the head of a charitable institution. Only a relative!

"Aunt Josephine is the most awful old thing. She does her hair in a tight knot and she keeps the sugar locked up and allows the servants two lumps apiece daily and she looks as if she could add and subtract correctly. She is inhuman, which is worse than being merely wicked. And she always asks me my children's ages, which I never know. And as if she and the others weren't bad enough, who should drop in but that unspeakable Mrs. Bilkins, looking just as usual—awful! and telling me that I looked 'quite settled and married.' I longed to choke her! She keeps the most horrible set of conundrums on tap to ask me, such as, 'Why do you wear your ruby brooch

with a tailored suit?" or "Why don't you get some nice, stout boots for walking?" I never know why I do anything and while I am staring at her helplessly and trying to think up some nice reasons she tells me hers, which are horrid, such as, 'Because you are fond of display' or 'Because you are vain of your feet.' Well, what I say is, if she knew the answers all along, why did she bother me about it? I escaped at last in a half fainting condition and made my way home. I shan't go to see Henry's relatives again. If Aunt Josephine wants to tell me things for my good let her climb the hill to do it. It isn't that I mind her and Mrs. Bilkins and all the other old frumps thinking these things about me. It is that I mind their saying them. I like nice deceitful people who don't vent their ill nature till your back is turned.

"And the real reason that I started to tell you about the tea was that when the relatives and the people who hadn't succeeded in marrying my husband got through insulting me, they turned to another and an engrossing topic which is ousting auction bridge and the fiendishness of servants and even the new hats with the whirligiggle things on top. (Are they really the very latest thing in Paris? Don't forget to tell me when you write. Milliners are such!—you can't depend on a thing they tell you, and I don't want to look ridiculous unless there is positively no choice between that and looking dowdy.) Well, as I say, this new topic has ousted even the hats. The topic is Theodora Carne.

"You know who she is, of course. I am sure that

you can't have helped hearing about her. She is the amazingly impossibly beautiful English girl who is spending the winter in Montreal at Mrs. Waite's. I believe her father was a second cousin of the latter's. Miss Carne's mother is there too, but then Mrs. Carne is emphatically 'Miss Carne's mother.' She never goes anywhere, is very quiet, very dignified, and has one of the saddest faces that I have ever seen. In fact, it is more than sad—it is almost terrified, as if she constantly lived in dread of something or somebody. To me she is even more mysterious and interesting than the daughter. But then she is a faded, insignificant little mite of a woman, while her daughter is a tall, willowy, glorious creature, full of vitality, in spite of the fact that her face is practically colourless—like a statue's. But the pallor seems alive—if you know what I mean, almost like a white flush. She has a Diana-like profile, clear-cut and coldly exquisite, and the most beautifully shaped hands and feet that I have ever seen. You know I am something of a connoisseur along those lines. Now, no doubt, if anyone else has written a description of her to you they will have spoken of her masses of red-gold hair and her curiously brilliant black eyes. But I speak of the things which charm me most in her appearance. Yes, charm! You know that I am not a beauty-mad creature like Lynn Amherst, but there is something about Theodora Carne which simply defies criticism or competition. For the first time in my life I am completely 'bowled over,' as a man would put it—and by a woman.

"Now, having said all this, you will probably think that little remains to be told of Miss Carne. My dear! That is where you make a complete mistake. Her beauty is the least of her. That is to say, her beauty is dismissed in a few words; the hordes of admirers which that beauty attracts receive a little more detailed attention; and then with one accord the gossips pass on to a third factor—which I cannot name!

"Perhaps it can best be described as the extraordinary, unaccountable and overwhelming effect which she produces on others. There! You didn't know I could spell so many long words, did you? The strange thing is that no two people quite agree as to what that effect is. On one point all are unanimous, though,—that it is uncanny and disturbing.

"Tell me, did you really notice anything extraordinary about Miss Carne when you met her first at Mrs. Bilkins?" I asked Lynn.

"I did."

"Good! Now do try to tell me exactly what it was!" I exclaimed. "People are so stupid! They keep saying to me that Miss Carne produces such an amazing effect upon them and not one of the lot can tell me what the effect is. Perhaps you can."

"Her answer was to draw a piece of paper from her pocket—no, I mean hand-bag; one doesn't have pockets now-a-days, unfortunately. 'There!' she exclaimed. 'It's so silly that I didn't think I would ever show it to anyone—but I don't mind you. Read it and see what you think of it. It is what I wrote

down after leaving the Bilkins'—what I wrote about my first impressions of Theodora, I mean.'

"'But what in the world made you write anything?' I asked in bewilderment; for Lynn, as you know, is the most matter-of-fact creature and one doesn't expect her to do things of that sort.

"'I don't know,' she said. 'If unformed ideas and superstitions are hovering about my brain, I always feel better for putting them down in cold print and seeing what they amount to.'

"'And what did they amount to in this case?' I asked, still amazed.

"She laughed unwillingly. 'See what you think they amount to,' she said, and handed me the paper.

"Well! I asked if I might send it on to you; she finally consented; so here it is verbatim.

"'Youth only is sorcery. Youth only is the one true magic. But when to youth is added beauty wild and radiant,—beauty such as the fabled creatures of hill and wave may have worn in the first spring-time of the planet—then youth touches the divine.

"'But there is something surrounding Theodora Carne, enveloping her, which is both stranger and stronger than her beauty. Is it possible to describe it?

"'A sense of mystery, subtle and fantastic, a vague, teasing memory of something which I once knew and have forgotten; a disturbing hint of things wild and sad and fatal. The knowledge, whispered by some hidden voice, that if I looked long enough and steadily enough into her dark, strange eyes I should find

something—the riddle of the universe, perhaps—hidden there.’

“I had got so far when Lynn interrupted me. ‘By the way, Del,’ she said, ‘I met the famous Dr. Schmidt the other evening at a dinner and had a long, interesting talk with him. We touched on some psychological problems and I could not help telling him about Miss Carne and the strange impression which she made on me. When I told him of my feeling about her eyes he was much interested. “It is ridiculous, of course,” said I. “Not ridiculous at all,” he said emphatically. “Hindoos would tell you that certain eyes—like the crystal ball and the pool of ink—induce certain states of mind in certain people. If you are what they call a seer you can see things in them which are happening a thousand miles away. I must meet this Miss Carne. She is evidently out of the common.”’

“‘Lynn, Dr. Schmidt may be a famous scientist and psychologist,’ I said, ‘but my own impression is that he is one goose and that you are another. Surely you don’t believe such utter tommy-rot?’

“‘Never mind what I believe, Del,’ she said, ‘but finish my paper and see if the rest is as silly as what went before.’

“‘There was not much else. ‘She emanated something—magnetism I suppose one would call it—so that, had it been dark, I should have felt her presence as keenly and surely as if she had been a flower blooming in the night. Yet there would have been terror in the sensation of her nearness; there is something

deadly and fearful about her personality, compelling as it is.'

" 'Is that all?' I asked as I finished.

" 'That is all,' said Lynn.

" 'Do you know what I should conclude if any young woman whom I met casually impressed me as Miss Carne has impressed you?'

" 'Oh, yes. You would conclude that you needed a tonic, I have no doubt. And so should I—if it were you who had written that screed. But you see it was not. Besides, there are one or two other facts, trifling in themselves, yet in a way remarkably significant.'

" 'Such as——?'

" 'That Mrs. Bilkins, who is perhaps the least imaginative person of my acquaintance, received as strong and as sinister an impression of Miss Carne as I did.'

" 'Impossible!'

" 'She told me that she did not believe in ghosts but that if she did she would think that Theodora was one.'

" '*Mrs. Bilkins* said that!'

" 'Mrs. Bilkins. My Aunt Joanna. Your pet aversion. She said all that and more.'

" 'Why, what in the world happened to make her say such a thing?'

" 'That is just the point,' said Lynn slowly. 'Nothing happened. That is—nothing that exactly bore on the case. Except that now I think of it Flop—you know Flop?'

"'Indeed I do. I have always longed to give him a pill—great, greedy beast!'

"'Flop is an old friend of mine, a most engaging and fascinating cat who wins hearts as well as sponge cakes. You are the most prejudiced——'

"'Never mind that. Drive on! What did Flop do? Open his mouth and denounce Miss Carne as a Suffragette or a devil-worshipper? Nothing can surprise me now.'

"'As soon as she entered the room he gave a sort of strangled howl and rushed away, his fur literally bristling with fright.'

"'I must positively get the recipe from Miss Carne before I call again. I wish he would give strangled howls and run away from me instead of rubbing his horrid head against my skirt and mewing for my muffin. No wonder Mrs. Bilkins thought the lady was a ghost. I should have thought that nothing short of a ghost would have scared that impudent beast. Well, well, well!'

"And then I stopped. For what else could one say when a sensible, matter-of-fact person like Lynn Amherst told one a yarn like that? Isn't it amazing? Well, to get back to my tea—try to imagine, if you can, Mrs. Bilkins holding forth on the subject of Miss Carne. Firstly, her offers—how Mrs. B. can possibly know who has proposed to the girl and who hasn't is more than I can tell—but she thinks she knows, anyway. Secondly, her 'effect' on Mrs. Bilkins.

"'She made my flesh creep,' she averred. 'And Flop knew something about her. Oh, Flop knew. He

knows more than his prayers, that cat! I would trust his instincts anywhere!

"Did you ever hear anything quite so silly?

"But, then, my dear, no sooner had Mrs. B., in a sibilant whisper, informed us that in her opinion Miss Carne was not 'canny,' than half a dozen other old frumps tuned up eagerly and said that they had all heard of other people who felt just the same way about her.

"No doubt it will all be explained in time. In the meantime she is simply the rage. Every man in town wants to meet her and every woman talks of nothing but her peculiarities. So you can judge for yourself whether or no she is a social success. Perhaps the gossip about her will die out a little now, for her latest exploit is to get engaged. Of course it is bromidic to get engaged; but then it is not bromidic to get engaged to Dick Herrod. They say he is quite mad about her and thinks of nothing else.

"Their engagement came about in a rather romantic way, if report speaks true. It seems that a mad dog was gambolling about, and that Miss Carne killed it by looking at it or some nonsense of that sort. Anyway, she fainted afterwards and on recovering from her faint accepted Mr. Herrod, though she had refused him several times before. That last is true, at least, for he tells it himself. In fact, he seems rather proud of the fact that she did not accept him at once. It must have been a refreshing surprise to him when one comes to think of it. At all events, they are now engaged; and, my dear, if you could see them to-

gether! The handsomest man in Montreal and the most beautiful woman in the world—for if Miss Carne is not that I miss my guess.

“By the way, another bit of gossip about the Carnes is that they are bigoted atheists. Neither one ever attends church and they did the queerest thing when Father Munn called. You know he was by when the mad dog episode took place and insisted on introducing himself and calling on Miss Carne. She received him with her mother, and despite the fact that Father Munn is the most charming old man in the world and fascinates everybody with the exception of Mrs. Bilkins, who is unfascinating, they seemed obviously uneasy during the call. Once when he started to quote something from the Bible Mrs. Carne interrupted him quite hastily and glanced at Theodora in the most worried manner. He was amazed, they say, and quite hurt, for he had taken such a fancy to the girl. However, that is not wonderful, for everything in male shape does take a fancy to her. All the other beauties are shelved.

“Of course, nobody is invincible. Here and there you find men who don’t think her even fascinating. Gerald Amherst, for instance; he says that, while she is one of the most beautiful women he has ever seen, he finds her quite dull and commonplace. I have heard one or two others make similar remarks. They are so greatly in the minority, though, as to be hardly worth mentioning; still, if it were not for them one would think that there was something supernatural in the way in which Theodora slays her tens of thou-

sands, so to speak, without an effort. One reads of such things in history; but in real life it is usually the girl who wants attention the most badly who gets it because she is willing to work for it. But Theodora is like the heroines of the *Young Ladies' Journal*. 'The beautiful Flora was at once surrounded by gentlemen'—you know the sort! Our cook takes it. It is the loveliest thing. There is one illustration where you can't see 'the beautiful Flora' for gentlemen, while all the ladies congregate in the background, transfixing her with stares of rage and envy. Theodora is just like that. Laura Jean Libbey would exult in her.

"From Laura Jean Libbey to Prof. Lant is a long pull, but both are authors and I am sure you will want to hear of a perfectly delightful talk I had with the latter the other day. You know his theories about women—that they are only fit to bear children, spin, and do the menial work of the world? Oh, yes—I beg his pardon!—and obey their husbands! He is rapidly converting me to Suffrage; the Pankhursts ought to pay him a rattling good salary to advocate their cause. Well! we got into conversation and he had the nerve to tell me that the Greek women were the happiest the world has ever seen because they were shut up like small-pox patients (my simile, *not* his!) and seldom saw anyone but their husbands. I believe that they did emerge once or twice a year for funerals. How they must have longed to hear of a death in the family! Do you know, when one hears of such things one is impelled to the thought that, in every age, there have been a large number of human

beings to whom liberty was as the breath of life. What happened to them when they were Greeks, I wonder? I mean Greek women. How they must have stifled and sickened in their cages! How fit the Greek women were for liberty may be faintly judged from the fact that Socrates himself used to resort to Aspasia for instruction and avowed himself to have benefited by her teachings. Strange to think that the master mind of the ages was taught by a woman at a time when women were shut up like so many wild beasts!

"But to return to the professor. 'How do you know,' I asked him, 'that the Greek women were happy? I notice that they were not allowed to leave any writings behind to testify to their happiness.'

"'They were too busy spinning,' Prof. Lant thought. 'However,' he added, more sternly, 'I know they were happy because of the way in which their husbands refer to them. Happy and contented!'

"'Ah, yes,' I returned, 'I recall the Greek proverb to the effect that a man has two happy days with his wife, the day he marries her and the day he buries her. That certainly sounds as though the Greek women were happy and as though their husbands lived happily with them.'

"'They were wives and mothers.'

"'So are the caged animals in the Zoo. But they are not as happy, as good-tempered, or as effective wives and mothers as when they live in the open.'

"Then an awful thought flashed across my mind. I was actually talking logic to a man—a fatal thing to do if you wish to be popular. So I dropped contro-

versy, smiled admiringly at him and told him, à la Katharine Parr, that I only argued with him for the sake of hearing what he had to say. Which was true enough, though not in the way I meant it.

"Poor man! He knows as much of women as I do of anthropoid apes. I feel so sorry for him and Nietzsche and Schopenhauer and Kipling that I should really like to open a class for their instruction. Unfortunately, most of them are dead and besides they wouldn't attend it if they weren't. There is only one way to teach a cat tricks and there is only one way to teach a man sense. 'What is it?' you ask. It is, my dear, to flatter him till he sees that you are a sensible woman, and flirt with him till he perceives that you are faultless. Then when he reaches the stage of not being able to keep away from you you can begin to teach him. But you must do it slowly and carefully, restraining your missionary zeal and remembering that truth is like pepper and must be administered in infinitesimal doses if it is to go down at all. Most people make the fatal mistake of administering truth as Mrs. Squeers did the brimstone and treacle. They force the poor unfortunates to swallow it, a soup ladle full at a time; the net result of which is that the poor unfortunates take an incurable dislike to brimstone and treacle—I mean, truth—and vow never to come within range of it again. I should commit no such mistake with Lant or Nietzsche or Kipling. I should administer truth as one administers brandy to a starving man, with due regard for his condition. And what a tea-party it would be!

"Speaking of educating Lant and Nietzsche reminds me of one thing more that I simply must tell you, though it is getting late and this letter is already an unconscionable length. Have you heard of all the reforms that are taking place in the city? My dear, there is no end to them. But unfortunately there is an end to my time for letter-writing and it has arrived. I must drop this and get dressed for dinner. To-morrow I have promised to go and see Lynn. She is going to be in for tea and has asked me to come and meet that young doctor everyone is making such a fuss about—Hale or Dale or something. He is a great friend of theirs and I believe Lynn and he go slumming together, which is very enjoyable, no doubt, though personally I prefer bridge. Now it is really good-bye, for I simply must dress for dinner. Good-bye and write soon—no, at once! and tell me all you are doing. Love and luck. Yours ever,

"ESTELLE HADWELL."

CHAPTER V

THE TROUBLE WITH MOST WOMEN

"The trouble with most women is that, when you argue with them, they insist on arguing back."—F. F. W.

MRS. EDGAR BROCK had battered valiantly at the doors of Society, realizing with earnest reverence the truth of the saying that while Society could not be starved into submission like the cities of old, it could and would be stuffed into rapturous and complete quiescence. Therefore, for many years she had unceasingly given dinners to everybody whom she did not know. Some of those invited came, inquired of one another why they had been asked,—and went away, firmly resolved to come again at the first available opportunity. For Mrs. Brock understood the art of feeding the well-fed. Now the earnest efforts of many years had been rewarded. Success stared her in the face. She was about to dine a former Governor-General of Canada, and Lord Haviland, his guest.

"Of course," said Mrs. Bilkins enviously, "a climber like that can get anyone to her dinners. Who cares what the woman herself is like when the food positively melts in your mouth. However," she added, more cheerfully, "she has gout!"

Mrs. Brock, however, had temporarily forgotten that she had gout or any other mortal ailment in the contemplation of her guests. The ex-Governor-General—was the ex-Governor-General. None could gainsay him. Like sterling silver he bore his hall mark with him. Lord Haviland also had the “guinea stamp.” Mrs. Brock knew that all her dearest friends were green with envy. What more could heart of woman desire?

Lord Haviland in addition to being an earl was a wealthy, kindly middle-aged gentleman who enjoyed travelling and was on his way to see the North-West. He was fond of his cousin—once-removed—Lynn Amherst, whose witty tongue and cheerful disposition had once enlivened a very dull English house-party; and he had said somewhere that his idea in visiting Montreal was to have a laugh—in other words, to see Lynn Amherst. Mrs. Amherst had been puzzled lately by the respectful applause with which her most trifling jokes had been received.

The dinner promised to be a great success. The profusion of American-beauties, cut glass, silver and shaded lights was usual; but the food was not. Every male face brightened at the first spoonful of soup; but what was merely brightness at the soup stage swelled into ecstasy with the advent of the fish and approached Nirvana with the roast. Gourmets sipped the wine with a fervour which bordered on the religious; gourmands gazed at the entrées with an almost horrible enthusiasm. So good was the dinner that it almost made one forget the diners.

Mrs. Amherst sat next to a politician—one of the kind whom we are all unfortunate enough to know. His outfit consisted of an exceptional pair of lungs and an extensive vocabulary. He used both with great effect in the edification of simpletons; but thinking people fled at his approach as at that of a simoon of hot air.

A little further down the table Mrs. Bilkins' deep bass voice roared forth platitudes about clinging vines and home treasures. A query crossed Lynn's mind as to why these clinging vine spirits always seemed to inhabit such gigantic frames. Clinging vines, gentlemen, do not come in small sizes. Many of the militant Suffragettes are small of stature and soft of voice. Yet it was thought necessary, on one occasion, to detail six thousand policemen to prevent twelve of them from reaching the Prime Minister. This seems to answer rather aptly one strong objection to Woman Suffrage; namely, that Woman's physical limitations prevent her from defending her country or protecting her vote.

Opposite Lynn sat a college professor. He was young and rather terribly well-informed. Mr. Bilkins, separated from him only by one female nonentity, tried hard to look polite; but his gaze, ever and anon, would wander wistfully to the other end of the table, where thoughtless middle-aged people told frivolous stories and cracked silly jokes. How hard it was to keep up to the level of the young! This young man had been reading Lant and held Views on Women. He thought it was best never to forget that they were

inferior beings or to let them forget it. Otherwise, they were apt to presume. One should not allow them to be too much in evidence, he thought; and, so far as was possible, one should instruct them as to their duties and obligations. Mr. Bilkins agreed that it might be an excellent plan. His face warmed and expanded at the thought; his eye fired. Unfortunately, at that moment, he caught sight of Mrs. Bilkins and his enthusiasm suddenly vanished.

Mrs. Amherst, wearying of the politician, turned with relief to her left-hand neighbour—a modest-looking man with a sparse whisker and a nervous nose. He was gazing coyly at a tempting bird on the plate before him, and as he caught Lynn's eye remarked conversationally that he had to be very careful what he ate at these dinners. Then, inspired by the soft sympathy of her glance, he burst into a spirited account of a fit of indigestion which he had once enjoyed. He described its cause—an unusually heavy supper of lobster salad, partaken of when unduly heated; its immediate result—agony; its after result—a whole week of half-boiled milk and crackers. He dilated dramatically on the appetizing and deceitful appearance of the lobster when he viewed it first as compared with the loathing with which the sight of lobster had inspired him ever since. Then, emboldened by Lynn's interest, he cheerfully proceeded to enumerate both the dishes which agreed with him and those which he found it impossible to digest.

Lynn glanced about her desperately. Her right-hand neighbour was full of hot food and happiness,

and the world seemed very bright to him. It always gave him great pleasure to reflect that he carried his drink so much better than any of his contemporaries. Lynn sighed. It was depressing to think that in this thickly-populated world there should be so very few to whom one could talk. Then she turned a glance of luminous interest on the thin man who was in the midst of explaining the way in which Welsh rarebit affected him. She had that patience with bores which is the distinguishing characteristic of the well-bred.

On the other side of the table Mrs. Hadwell was talking rapidly.

"What I want to know is why the poet shot himself?" she asked. "What is to prevent me from writing poetry that people won't read and then shooting myself because people won't give me a pension for doing it? I don't understand——"

"Ah!" interrupted the politician gallantly, "women never *can* understand business or politics."

Mrs. Hadwell may not have understood business or politics; but she did understand men. Therefore, after a suppressed gasp, she smiled confidently into the politician's face.

"Tell me all about it!" she begged. "Of course we don't reason like men." ("The Lord be thanked," she thought devoutly.) "So perhaps, dear Mr. Blake"—with a soft ingratiating smile,—“perhaps you will enlighten us.”

"Ah, certainly," returned Mr. Blake, stroking a heavy moustache with a flattered and pompous smile.

"What—ah, er—what is it exactly that you want to know? Why the poet wasn't given a pension?"

"Oh no," said Mrs. Hadwell coolly. "I know that much. He wasn't given a pension because they didn't want to give him one. What I want to know is why he thought they would want to give him one. Why——"

"Because he was a fool!" said Mr. Blake promptly. "Poets always are. The idea of a man thinking that he should be given a pension because he wrote poetry. Committed suicide, did he? Good riddance of bad rubbish, *I* say! Poetry be—blowed!"

The stunned silence which followed this was broken by Mrs. Hadwell's gentle voice.

"But I thought that myself, dear Mr. Blake. And I thought, when I said as much, that you said that women never could understand business or pol——"

"They can't. They can't. They're always governed by prejudice and they never see more than one side of a question at one time. But that doesn't alter the fact that this government is crazy and that that poet was a fool. You follow me?"

"Perfectly." Mrs. Hadwell spoke with conviction.

"And this," she said to herself, "this is the kind of thing that makes the laws for women!"

"One can always rely on Mrs. Hadwell for an intelligent understanding," said Mr. Blake with much gallantry.

"Yes. I always agree with you, Mr. Blake, just as soon as I know what your views are," said Mrs. Hadwell with simple fervour.

"That is what makes Mrs. Hadwell such a charming woman to talk to," said Mr. Blake in great good humour. "The trouble with most women is that, when you argue with them, they insist on arguing back. In these days of Suffragettes and such horrors it is a real pleasure to meet a womanly woman like Mrs. Hadwell."

But at the word "Suffragette" conversation, which had been as the tinkling of a fountain, became as the roar of the sea. Everyone had something to say on the subject and everyone wanted to say it. A young man with a retreating chin who had hitherto been attentive only to his meal looked up suddenly, his eye full of fury and his mouth of sweet-breads, and bel-
lowed forth that Man was the physical and mental superior of Woman; a second stated in hushed tones that he had it on the best authority that Christina Bankhurst planned to strangle Windholme Churchham's infant and go to the scaffold for the crime; a third hazarded the guess that Suffragettes did not often attack you unless you aggravated them first—apparently confusing them with bees! A very young man, willing to pose as a hero, threw out that he wouldn't mind having a pot at one with a revolver; and Prof. Lant, author of "Woman Explained," remarked solemnly that there was no more beautiful sight in the world than a mother with a child. Lynn Amherst mildly observed that she thought a still more beautiful sight was that of a mother with nine children. This sentiment being received with respect she went on to point out that Queen Victoria had

borne nine children and been a devoted mother to them while ruling the vastest empire that the world has yet seen; and meekly inquired why, if a woman were fit to rule an empire, she was unfit to govern a town; also, why being a mother should render anyone incompetent to be a mayor. The politician loudly shouted "Pooh, pooh!" which was perhaps the best thing he could have done under the circumstances, as people who habitually allow platitudes to take the place of thought find it difficult to understand that when you have proved the superiority of your lungs you have not necessarily proved the superiority of your logic. Then everybody else said that no good was ever done by woman going out of her sphere, and that a woman's place was the home, and that a woman was meant to be a wife and mother, and that the hand that rocked the cradle ruled the world. At this juncture a coal-cart obligingly thundered past and drowned the storm of bromides which threatened to submerge conversation; and as its echoes died away Mrs. Bilkins—whose contribution to the above-mentioned burst of eloquence had been that Man was the Sturdy Oak and Woman the Clinging Vine—went on to say that a woman had really no right to an opinion of her own anyway, and should always ask her husband for instruction.

"Who is more competent to instruct a woman than her husband?" she inquired sternly. Mr. Bilkins at the other end of the table jumped convulsively at the sound of her voice. "And if she has no husband whose fault is that, I should like to know. Not hers,

I should hope. Let her marry and obey as all good women should. Then peace and comfort will ensue."

Lynn vainly tried to imagine the sort of peace and comfort that would ensue did Mr. Bilkins attempt to put his wife's theories into practice.

"But suppose she has no husband, Aunt Joanna?"

"Let her get one!" bellowed Mrs. Bilkins.

"But suppose she can't. What is it Barrie says, 'Men's nae easy to get.'"

"Nonsense. Barrie was a man, wasn't he——?"

"Was and is."

"Therefore, naturally, he thinks that it is difficult for a woman to marry. Every woman knows better. There is no excuse for a girl not marrying now-a-days."

"I am inclined to agree with you, Aunt Joanna. As far as I can see nothing is needed but a little energy and persistence. When I see an unmarried woman I always think to myself that I see a lazy woman—one who expects pigs to run up to her, ready-roasted-begging-to-be-eaten, so to speak. Whereas if she, metaphorically speaking, sharpened her knife and made a dash at one pig after another in turn—why it stands to reason that she would get a pig of some sort in time, even if she did have to stand a good deal of grunting and squealing. But I am afraid I am letting my tongue run away with me. And anyway some people do seem to be shadowed by ready-roasted pigs, even in these matter-of-fact days. Miss Carne, for instance!"

At the mention of Miss Carne Suffrage too went

the way of all flesh. "Isn't she lovely?" murmured everybody; and everybody else said that she was and that no man could resist her and that she was sure to make a brilliant match. Conversation is like a catechism in certain circles; people ask questions, not in order to find out what other people think, but in order to hear them give the correct response.

"Still," hazarded Agatha Lighton, "though Miss Carne is certainly pretty, I don't know that she has had as many offers as people make out. How can they possibly tell? There is no way of knowing whether a man has really proposed to a girl or not."

"There is only one way of proving that a man has proposed to you," said Mrs. Hadwell, "and that is to marry him. And it sometimes seems as though that were too high a price to pay for the privilege of being believed."

Agatha Lighton looked pretty and said nothing. Hers was just such a face as one expects to find under a halo of gleaming, glossy chestnut curls, and seldom does find; a dream of pearl and rose, thrown into rich relief by sharply cut dark brows and clinging lashes. She was Lynn Amherst's cousin, and as unlike her in face and nature as it was possible for a woman to be. Her outlook on life was unmarred by foreboding and unstained by intelligence; she was thoughtless, mindless, inane; positive as to charm and negative as to everything else. Her nearest approach to a strong feeling was jealousy; jealousy of every better-looking woman than herself. This jealousy had lain in abeyance most of her life, as there were

few better-looking women anywhere than Agatha Lighton; but it had flamed into something like passion at the advent of Theodora Carne and the sight of her rich perfections.

"Personally," she said, lifting her lovely lashes gravely, "personally, I don't admire her. I don't think it is feminine to be so tall. She simply towers over everybody."

"So does Mont Blanc," returned Mrs. Hadwell. "Yet people have been known to prefer it to Mount Royal."

This was obviously intended for Mrs. Lighton, who relapsed into silence with an amiable pout. She had a charming little mouth, of the type commonly known as rosebud, which smiled or pouted at its owner's behest without the slightest reference to her real thoughts or feelings. Needless to say, the owner of this mouth was considered a person of great sensibility. She was also believed to have a keen sense of humour because, whenever she perceived that a man was trying to be funny, she never failed to make an immediate and charming display of small white teeth and engaging dimples. As Agatha often said of herself, she might not be clever but she had a great deal of sense.

Lord Haviland leaned forward with an air of interest.

"I had hoped to meet the Carnes this evening," he said. "Mrs. Carne is an old friend of mine, or rather her husband was. I haven't seen her much since his death—not at all, in fact, for nine years. She has

travelled extensively, I believe, taking her daughter everywhere. But people are beginning to wonder why they don't return to Carne. Miss Theodora must be quite twenty."

"Twenty!" ejaculated someone. "I should have thought her twenty-eight."

"And I not more than seventeen," hazarded another.

"And I no age at all," said Lynn. "Like Helen of Troy or Mary, Queen of Scots, or Fair Rosamund. I should never think of age in connection with her. She seems apart from such things like a legendary character. Fancy asking the age of a siren or a sorceress!"

"A siren or a sorceress!" ejaculated Lord Haviland. "Is that really the impression she makes on you? It wouldn't do to tell that to the country people about Carne. They are absurd enough already. Really, these simple-minded people in the little English villages in spite of board schools are just about as credulous as their ancestors were in the days of the Crusades when the Witch of Carne——"

"Cousin Harry! What is that about a Witch?"

"Why, the Witch of Carne!" he repeated. "You have surely heard that old tale?"

"Not a word. You are driving us wild with curiosity. Is there a Witch legend in the Carne family? If so, you simply must tell us about it."

"I suppose I may as well," rejoined Lord Haviland, laughing, but looking slightly uncomfortable. "It is public property, of course. But I am surprised that

the Witch ancestress hasn't been referred to in one way or another."

"It never has. But I can well believe that Theodora Carne had a Witch ancestress. There is something not quite earthly about her—something beyond the human looking out of her big eyes. I don't wonder she frightened the mad dog."

"What—what's that?"

"Haven't you heard about the mad dog which Theodora hypnotized with her eyes while someone shot it?"

"No. That's quite interesting, though, because the Witch of Carne had some queer power over animals. When she rode she never used whip or spur—just whispered in the horse's ear. And one of the most horrible things about her in the eyes of the peasants was that she used to play with a tiger—get into its cage and talk to it as if it were a living being. They thought, of course, that it was her familiar. It seems strange, now, doesn't it? Such superstitions? When you think how easily such things are explained."

"Yes. But do tell us about Theodora and the legend."

"In the time of the Crusades Sir Geoffrey Carne was taken prisoner and fell in love with his captor's daughter. She was an extraordinarily beautiful creature, and though a Saracen her hair was a brilliant red-gold and her skin very white——"

"Why, that's just like Miss Carne."

"Yes. Many of the Carnes have shown these characteristics; and Theodora's likeness to the Witch, as a child, was so marked that the country people were

afraid of her and used to make the sign of the Cross when she approached. Carne is in Devonshire, you know, and the old religion flourishes there. People say that that is one reason why her mother took her abroad when she was thirteen. She was afraid that the little heiress of Carne might not be popular with the tenants as long as they held these absurd ideas about her. Besides, Theodora was a peculiar child, there was no doubt about it. And once people of that kind get an idea—! Because of the tradition that the Witch could not bear to hear the name of the Almighty, or of Death, a story was spread by some housemaid to the effect that the child was not allowed to say prayers and almost died when the Sacred Name was mentioned before her. Which shows what absurdities may be believed if people are ignorant and superstitious enough."

"This is simply thrilling. Was it only Theodora's looks that made them connect her with the Witch in the first place?"

"Not altogether. There is a tradition that the Witch is to have another re-incarnation—that she is to appear on earth, and atone for her past by a series of good deeds. They alone will not save her, however. She must find a soul which will love her for herself alone and that love will redeem her. Her husband's might have saved her, had it lasted. But he soon tired of her, and in the end broke his solemn vow not to mention the Deity before her."

"What happened when he broke his vow?"

"She disappeared. Sir Geoffrey, however, repented

bitterly, and spent the rest of his life in prayers for her soul and in good deeds. That is why, I believe, she is to be allowed another chance."

"Well!" ejaculated Mrs. Hadwell, drawing a long breath, "to think that our mysterious English beauty should turn out to have such an ancestry! How do you suppose that the legend of the Witch ancestress ever started?"

"I fancy that when the knight appeared with a beautiful and silent Oriental bride whose ways were unlike the ways of English people, the ignorant peasants would be quite apt to fancy her supernatural. Then when they found her playing with tigers and talking to horses it was almost a foregone conclusion that she should have tradings with Satan. I only wonder that she escaped burning at the stake. Of course most of the stories about her are nonsense—but she may have had some occult powers, such as people possess even in these commonplace days."

The German scientist, Dr. Schmidt, who had not spoken hitherto, looked up from underneath his shaggy brows.

"In the course of my investigations into the psychical," he announced with a strong foreign accent, "I have found enough strange things to fill a library. I hypnotize an innocent-appearing young woman—an ignorant countryman—and behold! their souls as the ignorant would say—their subconscious minds as we call it—show themselves possessed of all knowledge, all powers. The ignorant young woman spouts Hebrew; the stolid youth plans a diabolical murder. And,

strangest of all to me, the fine society lady looks into the crystal and sees what has never happened but what happens two days later. Then you say to me that the days of magic are dead. If this young lady, who so much looks a Witch—if she had but one-tenth of what hundreds of others show—she would terrify all but the most learned—by which I mean myself and my confreres,” the scientist concluded, twinkling. “We are discovering what we have never suspected. We do not know what lies behind; but just the facts themselves that we every day uproot—they make wonder. I ask pardon of the company for my long speech.”

“Don’t dare to ask pardon for it,” said Father Munn, heartily. “You have interested us even more than Lord Haviland, and he entertained me more than I can well say. I was present when Miss Carne quelled the mad dog and I never saw anything finer. What a magnificent creature she is! No doubt the so-called Witch resembled her in face at least; and if in addition she possessed Miss Carne’s magnetic eyes and some hypnotic power, who can wonder at the tales that have sprung up about her.”

“Hypnotism doesn’t account for all the tales of course,” said Lord Haviland. “One was that she had the power of taking the shape of a greyhound and roaming the forest of Carne, frightening everybody to death. Another was that when she—her form—lay asleep in the castle, her counterfeit presentment roamed the woods, wailing and wringing its hands. Occultism has no explanation for that, has it?”

"Hasn't it?" The German smiled tolerantly. "My dear sir, when you have talked with the most intelligent of the Hindoos, when you have heard their tales of astral bodies, when you have seen bodies tranced in sleep in one spot, and your brother scientist swears to having seen them flitting through temple gates, a hundred miles away; then you begin to see that what the Middle Ages called witchcraft, and the nineteenth century superstition may really be some unknown force which you and I are too clumsy in soul or too ignorant to understand. The twentieth century is the age of tolerance. As your Hon. Russell says, we are no longer cock-sure about anything. We look for facts now; and when we have found them we next try to find their explanation; but we no longer sneer at and refuse to believe what we do not understand. That is why we are advancing so rapidly in every line of thought; that is why the next hundred years is going to see changes such as the world can only guess at now. But I talk too much."

"No you don't," said Lord Haviland. "I see that it was I who talked too much. But while we are on the subject of the much-discussed subconscious mind—is it true that people sometimes reveal under hypnotic trance secrets which they are not aware that they possess? I have heard that it is so."

"It is, indeed," said the German.

"How wonderful!" said Father Munn thoughtfully, "if a clergyman possessed the power of laying bare the secrets of all hearts! Or a judge! Or a doctor! What power they would have."

"Power, yes. But a terrible power. No human being should be allowed to hypnotize at will. A power so terrible should be exercised under supervision and with the greatest caution and tenderness."

"But to return to Miss Carne," said Mrs. Hadwell. "I really feel as if it were only right to tell Mr. Herrod what a mysterious bride he is getting."

"Who is Mr. Herrod?" exclaimed Lord Haviland. "Not—did I understand you to mean that he is engaged to Miss Carne?"

"Yes; hadn't you heard?"

"No," said Lord Haviland in amaze. "I can hardly believe it. Surely her mother would not allow——"

"Why," said Mrs. Hadwell, surprised in her turn, "we think a good deal of young Herrod in Montreal. He is so fine-looking—quite superb!—very well-to-do, and comes of nice people. Not aristocratic, you know; but quite presentable. Few of us here can say as much," she concluded, laughing mischievously.

"Oh—oh yes," said the other hurriedly. "Quite so. You must pardon my surprise. But you probably do not know that Miss Carne, in addition to being a beautiful young woman, inherits an old estate and is something of an heiress into the bargain. Besides—well, to speak plainly, she has the entrée into any society, and could, no doubt, aspire to a duke, if she were so minded."

There was a general exclamation.

"She is known to us only as Mrs. Waite's second cousin," said Lynn. "And Mrs. Waite is very reserved."

"Of course, people of the Carnes' stamp never talk about themselves. Still—one would have thought that these things would have become known in some way. Why, Queen Alexandra saw Miss Carne as a child and prophesied that she would be the beauty of England when she was presented. And although Carne is not a grand estate, it is an old one."

"Then, what in the world are these people thinking of?" inquired Mrs. Bilkins, majestically voicing the thoughts which no one else had the courage or the ill-breeding to express.

Lord Haviland looked at her with a twinkle in his eye. "Perhaps you had better ask them that direct?" he suggested gravely. "Although Geoffrey Carne was an old friend of mine I hardly know either his wife or his daughter. I shall certainly give myself the pleasure of calling on them now that I know that they are staying here. But the engagement is extraordinary. No doubt it is a love match. At least, if not, I am sorry for the young man. That is if she resembles her ancestress. Let's hope he doesn't offend her."

"Why?"

"Because tradition has it that very queer things happened to such lovers of the Witch as did not please her. They died mysteriously with no mark of violence. Others escaped more lightly. The lady had an amiable habit of appearing to them in the guise of a hound and uttering a mournful howl just when they were in a ticklish place. That usually did for them in one way or another—I don't mean killed them, but caused them to lose their balance and get a bad fall or

break a bone or something—I don't know what. There's an appalling amount of tradition about that wretched Witch; I don't wonder that Mrs. Carne was glad to escape from it for a while. But I confess I can't understand her burying Theo—I mean, letting her settle down here without even having her presented. Why, she bade fair to create a furore! And the Carnes generally love Carne so; I hate to think of it being rented indefinitely."

"To whom is it rented?"

"Oh, to some rich American. All very well while the girl was being educated, but I dislike the idea now. Geoffrey Carne would not have permitted it, I know. However, Mrs. Carne is sole guardian and there are no near relatives. So they can do as they like."

"Oh, dear!" said Mrs. Hadwell disconsolately. "I see Mrs. Brock 'collecting eyes.' Too bad! I don't know when I have enjoyed a dinner as I have this. You and Dr. Schmidt know such a lot of queer things that I could listen to you all evening; and I shall count the moments till you join us."

CHAPTER VI

APOSTOLIC BLOWS AND KNOCKS

"And prove their doctrine orthodox,
By apostolic blows and knocks."

—BUTLER.

MRS. BILKINS felt that the customs of her house were as the laws of the universe—immutable. To suggest that dinner might be an hour earlier or later savoured of impiety; to ask that a room might be swept at half-past ten instead of eleven was like asking that the sun might rise at two instead of four. It was Mrs. Bilkins' practice to lie down for exactly one hour every day after a late lunch. Therefore, when at three the Amherst's door-bell rang agitatedly and Mrs. Bilkins was ushered into the library where Lynn sat, the latter sprang to her feet, inquiring—

"What has happened, Aunt Joanna?"

Mrs. Bilkins appeared to be struggling for words.

"Have you—are you in trouble? Have you—have you lost anyone?"

An emphatic nod was the only answer.

"Oh, Aunt Joanna, I am so sorry. Who is it? A relation?"

"A relation!" exclaimed Mrs. Bilkins scornfully.

"I could spare a relation or two very nicely. *I've* lost my cook."

"What! That nice one you were so satisfied with?"

"Yes," rejoined Aunt Joanna mournfully. "It's always the way. Once you get a really good one she always goes. It's enough to make one lose faith in human nature. The last one left because I thought it my duty to point out to her that she was too old to have a beau. I only did it for her good. But one must not expect gratitude in this world for doing one's duty."

Lynn forebore to point out that when one's "duty" consists in minding other people's business one must be particularly careful not to expect gratitude; and inquired instead what had caused the departure of the last cook.

"I don't know," said Mrs. Bilkins, lowering her voice mysteriously. "But the way in which she left was so strange that I thought it only right to run over and tell you about it."

The things that people "think it only right to tell" are apt to be worth hearing. Lynn pricked up her ears.

"Not," pursued Mrs. Bilkins thoughtfully, "that I exactly blame Miss Carne. But then she certainly was in Egypt. And I never found Annie out in a lie, though I did my best. And who could ever have thought that a thing like that would have happened!"

"Dear Aunt Joanna, don't you think it would be better if you began at the beginning of your story? Or, if you can't do that, why not begin in the mid-

dle and work back. Only please do not begin at the very, very end. If you do, I can't possibly follow you."

"The idea!" said Mrs. Bilkins hotly. "If there is one person in this world who can be depended on to tell a story clearly, that person is I. I wonder at you, Lynn. How can I possibly make myself any plainer? It wasn't my fault that Annie saw the picture. I don't believe in servants being allowed to see portraits anyway. They are intended to sweep and cook, not serve as art critics. But I don't know what the world is coming to now-a-days!"

"Ah!" said Lynn, enlightened. "Annie saw a picture—a portrait."

"Haven't I just said so? Though why she should write me such a note I fail to see."

"And she wrote a note, did she?" inquired Lynn hopefully. "Yes. Go on, Aunt Joanna. What was in the note?"

"Why, just that—that she couldn't stay and hoped I would forgive her, but her family had never had dealings with the Black Art, and though I was a heretic she was sorry for me. Most impertinent! And very confusing! For what is the Black Art? And what does she mean by a heretic?"

"Oh, that is a name which ignorant people call other people who don't think as they do. But I don't understand about Egypt."

"Dear, dear, it is hard to make you understand anything to-day, Lynn. Miss Carne was in Egypt. She told me so herself."

"But what has Miss Carne to do with it?"

"Upon my word! I have the temper of a saint, but sometimes I lose it! Don't you remember that little picture of Miss Carne which Gerald painted and which he brought to show your Uncle Abernethy and then went away and forgot?"

"Why, yes, of course. So that was it. Annie saw the picture and went away, leaving a note about heretics. But what a queer thing! And Egypt! What did she say about Egypt? You haven't told me yet."

"I haven't? I've told you fifty times if I've told you once," said Mrs. Bilkins, justly enraged. "She said that when she was in Egypt she had fallen under the power of the Evil Eye and she was my well-wisher and so would I burn the picture and say a prayer for myself and she had just had her wages and she didn't need a character, so good-bye and God help me."

"What did Uncle Abernethy think about it?" inquired Lynn, after pondering for a moment.

"As if it mattered what your Uncle Abernethy thought!" ejaculated Mrs. Bilkins with superb contempt. "I believe he did try to talk some nonsense about her having been offered a place with better wages. But I wasn't listening."

"What do you think yourself?"

"I? I think there's something very queer about that girl, Lynn. Not Annie—Theodora! You remember the Brocks' dinner and Lord Haviland telling us about her ancestress who was a Witch and disappeared when she heard the Name of God?"

"Yes."

"Well, I didn't think much of it when I found she never went to church because a girl with money of her own can afford to be peculiar up to a certain point—though it does seem as if she might turn up at Xmas and Easter, just to show that she really is a Christian! And I thought that probably we were foolish the day that she called—though I must say in justice to myself that I very seldom *am* foolish! And cats do take fancies—though Flop is not an ordinary—but what I was going to say was that something has happened since then that puts a different complexion on affairs and makes me wonder whether—whether——"

"Whether what?"

"Whether Theodora Carne is quite canny," muttered Mrs. Bilkins in a low voice. "Don't look at me like that, Lynn. I don't know what to think. But what I am going to tell you is true."

"What is it?"

"I wrote a while ago to Mrs. Mann, who is in Rome this winter, and told her about the Carnes. She wrote back that a very beautiful Miss Carne was in Rome last spring and created quite a furore. The Italians used to follow her around like dogs on account of her red hair—poor, benighted heathens!" ejaculated Mrs. Bilkins, whose much-mentioned hair had been flaxen-gold. "But every man who fell in love with her had some dreadful accident—they could not help noticing it—and people began to be afraid of her, and started crossing themselves when she passed in the street—the heathen Italians, I mean. Then one day

a young American who was daft about her but who had offended her in some way met her as she was coming out of a crowded restaurant and said something to her—he had taken a little too much, poor young man! something about God Almighty or some dreadful thing like that! And no sooner had he spoken than she shrieked in the most horrible way and dropped on the ground, foaming at the mouth and turning the colour of clay. It was a horrible sight and my friend said she wouldn't have missed it for anything. The girl had to be carried to the nearest house—she was quite insensible—and next day she and her mother left Rome. Now, what do you say to that?"

"Fits."

"What?"

"Fits. That would account—that would account for everything—at least for almost everything. Poor child!"

"Who is a poor child?" inquired Mrs. Bilkins in bewilderment. "You don't mean to say that if this tale is true you are calling that horrid creature a poor child? I think she is unfit to be spoken to. To make a public spectacle of herself in that way!"

"She probably didn't make a public spectacle of herself on purpose. People don't foam at the mouth by way of passing the time, you know. Besides, the story was probably exaggerated. But it's rather interesting, nevertheless, coming on top of all that we've heard."

"Lynn!" said Mrs. Bilkins, lowering her voice mys-

teriously. "Do you remember the day she called at my house at tea-time—do you remember what an awfully queer impression she made on us both?"

"Yes."

"Do you—now don't laugh—but do you think there could be anything in those stories—you know! the stories about the Witch?"

"Why, Aunt Joanna!"

"I know it sounds foolish," said Mrs. Bilkins shamefacedly but firmly. "But you remember the Witch of Endor. That was in the Bible. And a friend of mine had a violin that used to play of itself. And they say that Sir Oliver Lodge believes in spirits—a man like that, with a title and all! So it doesn't do to be narrow-minded. What are you laughing at?"

"Well, Aunt Joanna, I am laughing at you, to tell the truth. I don't see what the Witch of Endor and violins and Oliver Lodge have to do with a girl fainting. Besides, when you talk of the Bible, you must remember that Father Munn, who is a clergyman—and incidentally the best Christian I know,—is devoted to Theodora."

"Father Munn!" ejaculated Mrs. Bilkins with lady-like horror. "Oh, Lynn, I should never think of calling him a Christian. Why, he wears vestments! And they say he would burn incense if the Bishop would let him."

"Burning incense seems to me a harmless amusement enough. And as for vestments, why on earth shouldn't he wear them if he wants to? Surely it's

no more foolish to wear vestments than to wear a hobble skirt?"

"What! Do you then believe in coquetting with the Scarlet Woman? Touch not, taste not, the accursed Thing!" quoted Mrs. Bilkins solemnly.

As Lynn had not the remotest intention of touching or tasting either the vestments or the Scarlet Woman, she was naturally mystified. However, Aunt Joanna's meaning at last came home to her.

"Oh, I see! You think it is High Church to wear such things."

"I think," said Mrs. Bilkins, "that Father Munn is worse than the beasts that perish, because they at least sin in ignorance. But he has been brought up in a Christian land and knows better."

"Better than what?"

"Better than to wear vestments."

"Why, if wickedness consists in wearing vestments, he certainly is worse than the beasts that perish, for the most abandoned dogs and cats of my acquaintance have not yet sunk so low as to sport them. But I never knew before that a chasuble was a badge of infamy."

"It is all very well to scoff at sacred things," said Mrs. Bilkins in a hollow voice, "but I should not be surprised if on the Judgment Day Thugs and cannibals and—and such people—went in ahead of Father Munn."

Lynn surveyed her in silence.

"I was not scoffing," she said at last. "I don't regard dogs or cats or Thugs or High Church clergy-

men or cannibals as sacred things. I am also very thankful that the Protestant Church has no Inquisition."

"What an irrelevant brain you have, Lynn, if you will excuse my saying so. What in the world made you think of the Inquisition?"

"Something you said. But to return to Father Munn! Have you any other reason for disapproving of him beyond the fact that he wears a chasuble?"

"None. But I always feel it my duty to lift up my voice and protest against the thin edge of the wedge of Rome which in the end stingeth and biteth like an adder."

"Where is that text, Aunt Joanna?" inquired Lynn with unaffected interest.

Mrs. Bilkins, however, was not of that frail stuff which allows itself to be cornered. "I am afraid you don't read your Bible as often as you might, Lynn," she boomed majestically; and Lynn subsided, gazing with real admiration at her august relative.

"To return to Theodora, Aunt Joanna!" she said. "Surely you are not going to let such absurd superstitions influence you."

"Certainly not. But I shall drop the Carnes for a while, nevertheless, till I know more about them. A leader of society has to be careful."

When Mrs. Bilkins started alluding to herself as a leader of society, Mrs. Amherst knew that argument was useless. She contented herself with one parting shot.

"Have you ever heard of the Irish member who

said that he was obliged to follow his constituents because he was their leader?"

"No. But that expresses my meaning exactly. I must follow society because I lead it. How clever!"

"Otherwise you mightn't?"

"Mightn't what?" inquired Mrs. Bilkins, gazing with severe suspicion at her pseudo-niece.

"Will you stay and have tea with me, Aunt Joanna?" inquired Lynn hastily. "Del Hadwell is coming in, and she is bringing Agatha. Harold has given Agatha the loveliest ermine stole and she wants me to see it."

"Your old admirer!" ejaculated Mrs. Bilkins in sentimental accents.

"I should have forgotten long ago that he had ever been my admirer," said Lynn restlessly, "if Agatha would only stop telling me how much in love with her he is, and flaunting his presents in my face. When people are married they should forget their husbands' old flames and live in the present. But she won't."

"I should certainly like to stay for tea, Lynn, if you will have it early. If you will let me sit in this big chair I shall just take forty winks to make up for my lost nap this afternoon. Dear me! How can you sit there sewing on Evelyn's new coat and keeping up a conversation at the same time? I don't believe you can have done it properly. And your trying to do two things at once accounts for the irrelevant rejoinders which you have made once or twice to perfectly sensible remarks of mine. What? You have nearly finished the buttonholes and you have

heard every word I said? Nonsense, Lynn! How can anyone do two things at once and do them well? Why don't you answer me? Oh, very well, perhaps I had better compose myself for my nap, as you suggest; those young things will be coming in presently and then there will be an end to improving conversation. Though I must say Del Hadwell is not young in any sense of the word and she grows more foolish every year she lives. Well, that's neither here nor there; I must have my nap."

Mrs. Bilkins did not have her nap, however. The silent listener opposite proved too fascinating, and half an hour later, when the guests arrived, the admonitory monologue which Mrs. Bilkins mistook for conversation was in full swing.

Mrs. Hadwell made a gesture of comic despair behind Mrs. Bilkins' back as she entered, but greeted her with her usual cheerfulness and vivacity. Then Agatha's stole was duly admired; and by the time tea was served and the lights lit, all four women were chatting comfortably. The conversation had drifted back to the one absorbing topic—Theodora Carne.

"I don't like her," said Agatha decisively. "I am so glad that others are beginning to dislike her too. She is so—so—I don't know what it is, but everyone gets scared of her. When she looks at one and smiles in that queer, sleepy manner, it makes one feel—I don't know how it does make one feel—but it isn't nice somehow. It makes one think of queer things

—ghosts and serpents and things like that! I can't describe it."

"Agatha!" exclaimed Mrs. Hadwell. "You have hit the nail on the head. And so you have felt that too; you who are the least fanciful, the least imaginative of mortals!"

"Oh, I flatter myself there is a little more to me than some people think," said Agatha darkly. "I can see disagreeable things just as quickly as anybody."

"I have no doubt whatever of that," said Mrs. Hadwell sweetly.

"Personally," said Lynn, "I think it is too bad that poor Theodora should get hauled over the coals because she has a strange smile and because someone comes along and tells people that she had a Witch ancestress. Of course it is natural that people should say that she is peculiar, because she is, but as for the rest——"

"Ah!" said Agatha, settling comfortably back among her cushions, "but the uncharitable and the evil-minded, of course, say a good deal more than that!"

"The worst of what the uncharitable and the evil-minded say is that it is so apt to be true!" murmured Mrs. Hadwell. "What do they say in this instance, Agatha?"

"They say she is a vampire," said Agatha in a hushed whisper.

Lynn burst into a fit of laughter.

"Agatha! Is this the twentieth century, and is this Montreal, and are you twenty-four?"

"No, I am twenty-three," said Agatha stiffly. "I shall not be twenty-four for a long time."

"Well, twenty-three, then. It doesn't make any difference. Are you serious?"

"Oh, quite."

"You believe in vampires, do you?"

"Now please don't try to fasten that tale on me," said her cousin indignantly. "The idea! As if I believed in such things! You insisted on knowing what the uncharitable and evil-minded said and I told you."

"I wasn't asking what the feeble-minded and mentally afflicted surmised."

"I don't understand long words," said Agatha sulkily, "and I think you are rather rude, Lynn. Miss Carne is queer, you know she is; and you can't prevent other people from having their own ideas. Lots of people believe in ghosts now-a-days, not only professors and clergymen and people like that, but our plumber. He was fixing a pipe the other day and he told me a story of a haunted cellar where he was laying something—I forget what——"

"A ghost, perhaps!"

"Nonsense! Pipes, or something like that."

"But what has your plumber to do with Theodora?"

"Why, only this: if sensible people like that believe in ghosts, why not in vampires? The plumber was not like a man who read and studied a lot and was liable to get his brain muddled; he was a practical man who nailed up rat-holes beautifully." Agatha spoke reverently; in common with a large majority,

she thought a practical man a man who could hammer tacks.

"And do you believe in ghosts?"

"Oh, no," said Agatha, looking shocked. "I don't believe in anything,—except, of course, in going to church and being confirmed at the right age and all those things that all nice people believe in. There aren't any ghosts in the Bible, and I told the plumber so."

"And what did the plumber say?"

"He said that there was a ghost in that cellar," said Agatha simply.

"*Well!*" said Lynn, bursting into an uncontrollable laugh, "I thought the witch craze was over centuries ago, but it seems I was mistaken. Yet, whatever one may fancy, I think it is a safe rule to judge not, lest we be judged."

"Certainly. I mean certainly not. That is in the Bible, I believe," said Mrs. Bilkins piously. "But it has nothing to do with Miss Carne. My opinion is that she is queer and that it will be best to drop her—for the present anyway."

"To be resumed once we have good and sufficient proof that she is not a vampire," said Mrs. Hadwell solemnly.

"Proof!" said Lynn helplessly. "How on earth is anyone to prove that she is not a ghost or a vampire or the reincarnation of an ourang-outang? I hope no one calls on me to prove that I am not a cream cheese. I should be hard put to do it. There's the

bell. Who's coming now, I wonder? The tea is like ice."

It was a day of surprises. A fashionably dressed young lady burst into the room, kissed Lynn with enthusiasm, shook hands with the others, giving little bird-like cries of delight as she did so, then gasped eagerly,

"Have you heard the news?"

"No. What?"

"About the broken engagement?"

"Not a word. Whose?"

"Whose? Why, Miss Carne's. She's thrown Dick Herrod over."

"What?"

"Oh, my dear, it's true. I stopped him in the street ten minutes ago and started to congratulate him, apologizing for not having done it before. And he went as white as a sheet and stammered out, 'I am not engaged, Miss Field. My engagement is broken. Please excuse me. I am going to Ste. Agathe with Fred Merton and I have only just time to catch the train. We're going for the ski-ing. Good-bye!' Then he rushed off as though the devil in person were after him."

There was silence for a moment. Then—

"Now, what do you think of that?" demanded Mrs. Bilkins triumphantly. "What have you to say to that?" She looked at Lynn, who answered,

"Nothing."

"Nothing!" repeated Mrs. Bilkins with severe disappointment. "Nothing! That is a queer thing to

say when you get such a piece of news. Perhaps now you will attach more importance to Egypt and my friend in Italy and Sir Oliver Lodge."

"Oh, yes, and to the violin that played of itself. They all have so much to do with a young man and woman deciding that they are not suited to one another. If we can't be charitable, Aunt Joanna, at least let us make an effort to be sensible."

"I am never anything but charitable and sensible," Mrs. Bilkins informed her coolly. "But I feel it my duty to go at once to Lady Deane's and tell her of all this. I am sure she would never forgive me if she heard it from anyone else."

"Oh, and I must go too!" cried Agatha. "Not to Lady Deane's, but to—to someone else's. I'll just have time before dinner. Good-bye, Lynn."

"Hurrah!" cried Mrs. Hadwell with intense enjoyment as the door closed on the departing guests. "Lady Deane's and—someone else's! That will be cheaper than printing the broken engagement in the 'Personals,' and every bit as effective. Cheer up, Lynn! Theodora's done for; she's a jilt now as well as a Witch and a vampire, and you may as well look pleasant about it and tell me how you like my new hat."

CHAPTER VII

IF THOUGHT CAN REACH

"If Thought can reach to heaven,
On heaven let it dwell,
For fear that Thought be given
Like power to reach to hell."

—KIPLING.

BATHED in the rays of a silver winter moon, the little town of Ste. Agathe lay sleeping. In silence the night fell; in silence intense and sorrowful as though God gazed mournfully on the sad world which he had called into being. The dull and weary wastes, beloved of ski-ers, were illumined faintly by the pale moon and showed barren and ghost-like in the fading light. A brooding lonely stillness lay on the world. Only the beautiful ancient firs stirred restlessly.

Beyond, below the heights, lay the quiet hamlet over which the shadow of the White Plague hung menacingly. In the cottages, the sanitariums, crouched the stricken victims of the Scourge, shivering in their icy beds, and inhaling the dry, crisp air which alone could save them from the death they dreaded. Herrod and Merton, reaching the top of a hill some distance from the village, paused for a moment and looked down without speaking.

The moon was buried beneath an ink-black cloud

and the darkness deepened ominously. The faded rolling hills were blotted out and the thick gloom pierced the hearts of the two men who stood, lost in the immensity of stillness and blackness. All Nature seemed waiting and holding her breath—for what? They stood in silence till the pale face of the moon peered feebly forth through rifts in the black clouds. Herrod stirred uneasily then and turned away.

He had the rather cruel, intensely "common-sensible" outlook of the average man of his type. The sight of these sleeping cottages and the thought of what they meant roused in him all the average healthy man's dislike of unhealth and the average healthy man's dislike to seeing it or thinking about it. His brow darkened as he glanced about him. "I wouldn't take a thousand dollars to stay in this place a week," he muttered. "Beastly! Ski-ing's good, of course; but confound it all! I half wish I hadn't come. Such a dreary hole!"

"By Jove, I wouldn't mind staying here a little bit!" said Merton comfortably. "Always was a lazy beggar, you know! and if I had to choose a disease, give me consumption every time. Keeps you in the open air,—and such air!"—he sniffed the delicious ether appreciatively,—“makes you just sick enough that you mustn't do much, and yet not so sick that you can't read and talk and enjoy yourself in various ways; makes it a duty to be perfectly lazy for a time, and then turns you out, feeling fitter than you ever felt in your life before.” He warmed to his subject. "Why, I knew a chap once——"

"Oh, shut up!" cried Herrod, goaded beyond endurance. "Talk sense or keep quiet, there's a good fellow! I daresay consumption's delightful, but you're welcome to my share and my blessing with it. It's one of those good things that I'm quite willing to let others enjoy."

Merton shrugged his shoulders good-humouredly, and reflected that he had never known a little thing like a disappointment in love to change a man's character so. A fortnight ago Herrod had been the perfection of amiability and reasonableness; now he was a bear. That sort of thing didn't last long, fortunately; he would soon be his old self again. Confound the girl! What could the trouble have been? She must have thrown him over pretty roughly too. Of course she had done the throwing; anyone could see how Herrod felt about her by the way he was acting. What a pity! Such a beautiful creature, with money of her own into the bargain! He felt no real resentment of Herrod's manner; the two had been tried friends for years, the kind of friends so often seen: one big, handsome, domineering, assertive, the other short, plain, sweet-tempered, unassuming. Theirs was one of those mutual attractions and companionships which laughs at time and outlasts far keener loves.

The clouds lightened as they advanced; the stars peeped forth. What a hard, heartless thing is starlight! How coldly it lights the universe when the great kind sun is resting! How coldly it lay this night on the glacial blue-white snow, the lonely wastes

and stretches! How little it seemed to reck of human gain or loss! Merton, the least imaginative of men, shrugged his shoulders in a displeased sort of fashion as he and Herrod silently glided on. Ski-ing was great sport, but one wanted as companion a jollier sort of chap than one who had just been jilted.

They reached at last a great cliff-like hill which shot up, white and forbidding, against the sombre background of woods. A splendid hill for a jump!

"Here you are, Herrod!" shouted Merton joyously. "Here you are! I'll race you to the top."

It was a spiritless sort of race, however. Herrod's ill humour and depression seemed to communicate themselves to his companion, who lost interest in the race even before it was well started, and lagged grumbling behind. However, he at last reached the top and clapped Herrod on the back with a half-hearted sort of boisterousness.

"You won, old boy!" he said with forced jocoseness. "You won! There's something in this infernal place that seems to take the heart out of one. Well! now that we're here, let's take the jump together."

Herrod did not answer. He was standing, his handsome, massive figure steady in the moonlight, his fine head turned slightly in the direction of the woods. He seemed to be listening for or to something.

"What's up, Herrod?"

"Did you—hear anything?"

"Not I. What's the matter with you to-night? You act as though you were moon-struck. Come on!"

Herrod waited a moment longer, then shrugged his

shoulders and moved forward, measuring the depth beneath.

"See here, Herrod!" said Merton roughly, "what's the matter with you? I suppose you've your own troubles; we all have; but we don't all act like ghouls about them. If you want to sit at home and moon about your girl then sit at home and moon; but if you want to ski——"

"Here!" burst forth the other with sudden fury, "I don't want any more of that! I'm minding my own affairs; you mind yours. If you don't like my company, you're welcome to leave it any time you like; but if you stay here with me——"

"Oh, all right!" returned Merton, unruffled. "That's the way to talk. I take it all back. Come on, let's——"

He stopped. A low mournful howl crept forth, a howl that rose and fell and lingered horribly on the icy breathless air. A howl that seemed in some mysterious way to be far distant, yet close at hand. Both men started.

"Some dog!" cried Merton. "By Jove! He doesn't sound happy."

"Did you—did you think it was a dog?"

"Of course I thought it was a dog," returned the other, staring. "What did you think it was? A cat? Or a horse? I say! What's that?"

The form of a hound stood clearly in the moonlight, casting a monstrous silhouette on the frozen snow where they were standing. Its head was lowered, its great eyes fixed on Herrod.

"It's a dog!" said Merton, in amaze. "A dog! The one that howled. But who would have thought it was so near? By Jove! it's an uncanny-looking brute, Herrod! Look at the way it stares at you!"

He said no more. Herrod with a sudden hoarse cry stumbled and fell by his side. Merton sprang forward as best he could and anxiously questioned his friend. Herrod made no answer. He lay doubled up in a queer heap, his face turned to the stars. Merton, bending over, recoiled in horror; he seemed to be gazing on a very mask of death. Springing to his feet he called lustily for help. The mysterious hound had vanished; but a queer shadow had fallen over the snow and the stars looked no longer cold, but menacing. Merton, a good deal to his own amazement and discomfort, could not make up his mind to the sensible course of leaving his friend for five minutes while he went in search of aid. He stood, shouting hoarsely, until at last a party of young men on skis heard the cries. One of these, a medical student, on attempting to raise Herrod, found that his collar bone was broken. It was a labour of some difficulty to improvise a stretcher and carry the injured man to the village; however, the boys worked with a will, showing no disappointment at the breaking up of their evening. Merton, anxious and perturbed, walked by the side of the stretcher. It had been a most unpleasant evening; and then that it should end like this!

"Any of the people round here got a dog?" he asked gruffly. "A well-set-up, fine-looking brute something like a greyhound? It started up out of noth-

ing, over yonder, and upset my friend so that he lost his balance and tumbled over on this cursed slippery snow. People should keep dogs like that chained up."

No one seemed to know of any such dog. There were many winter visitors in Ste. Agathe, though, who might well possess one.

"This was such a queer-looking brute!" persisted Merton. "There was something about it—I don't know what—something out of the way. And ye gods! what a howl it gave when we heard it first! Sounded like a lost soul and a tortured devil rolled into one. Sure none of you heard anything like that?"

The boys were very sure that they had heard nothing at all like that. They were politely amused by Merton's description. Dogs did sometimes bay at the moon, whispered one; and this witticism being received with stifled laughter Merton reddened and said no more. When Herrod's collar bone had been attended to Merton received a summons to the room where his friend lay, ghastly white, and evidently unnerved.

"Merton!" he began unsteadily, "just before—just before—I fell—what happened? Anything?"

"Yes. A dog howled and sprang up out of nowhere in front of us. It seemed to bother you. Don't you remember? Most uncanny brute——"

"Ah—ah, yes—a dog! Did you—did you notice anything unusual about it?"

"Can't say I did," returned Merton uneasily. What on earth was the fellow driving at? "There's some-

thing unusual about any dog that stares you out of countenance when you don't expect to see it."

"Did you notice its eyes?"

"You bet I did."

"Remind you of anything—of anybody?"

"No—I don't think so. Whoever's got eyes like that has got a most infernal stare, though."

"Don't. Don't say—infernal. It's—what I thought. . . . But I used not to think so. Well, good-night—good-night, old chap! Sure that you didn't—didn't—never mind! I'm dopy to-night, I think. Don't tell anyone I spoke like this; I don't mean anything by it, you know. The dog was just like other dogs, but the—the moonlight or—or something—had got on my nerves; and I fancied—oh, good-night. Sleep well, old fellow! I say! Would you mind leaving that bell where I can lay my hand on it? If—if I should want you in the night—would you hear me, do you think? I don't quite know what's the matter with me!"

"Girl!" muttered Merton, as he left the room. "Plain Girl! That's what's the matter with him. What the deuce broke up that engagement? Fancy old Dick cutting up like this over a girl. It's not as if there weren't millions of other girls in Canada. Faugh! Don't wonder the dog upset him. What did it want, I wonder? Can't get its beastly eyes out of my head. I believe I'll have a drink before I turn in."

CHAPTER VIII

"IF THERE WERE ONLY!"

"If there were only silly women enough to go round the good ones would never get a look in."—J. M. BARRIE.

AGATHA," said Lynn Amherst, "has as much imagination as a cat. But she is as practical as Carnegie. Therefore, Gerald, when she says that she sees a thing, you may depend upon it that thing is there."

"Yes, rather stupid," said Gerald Amherst absently. "A jolly little soul, though, don't you think?"

"I think she never fails to laugh heartily when you tell her a funny story she doesn't see the point of. It is never difficult to amuse a girl whose teeth are as good as Agatha's."

"Lynn!" exclaimed her husband in amazement, "do you mean to say that you are getting catty? Don't, please!"

Lynn laughed. "I suppose I am horrid. But I shall be horrider still by way of excusing myself, and say that I believe that I have caught it from my relatives. I have never seen so much of them as since Miss Carne came to Montreal. They run here day and night, trying to convince me that she is a ghost or a greyhound or something equally absurd."

"And cattiness is catching, I suppose!"

"It ought not to be. I know too that they are much nicer than I in many ways. But you are so nice, Gerald, that you spoil me for ordinary people; and anyway the women of a generation back never grew up. They are sweet and lovable, many of them; but they *are* so small. But there! this is a horrid way to begin the day. Let us stop abusing others and return to Theodora. I don't bother you, do I, talking while you paint?"

"Oh, no, this is just mechanical work; I could do it with my eyes shut. Well, to return to Miss Carne then; what on earth does all this gossip mean? She strikes me as an ordinary girl enough, apart from her beauty, which, of course, places her in a class by herself."

"Don't you, then, find anything—feel anything—notice anything strange about her personality?"

"Not a thing! I believe the whole business to be sheer nonsense and I wonder at your attaching so much importance to it. Really at times I think that Montreal has gone mad."

"She doesn't give you a creepy feeling—or——"

"Nary a creep!"

"Or—or fascinate you?"

"Every pretty woman fascinates me in one sense. But there is only one in all the world whom I find perennially fascinating and I see a great deal of her, thank you."

Lynn laughed.

"What a pretty speech! But Gerald,—talking of

it all being nonsense—you don't attach any importance then to the fact that she cannot hear the Sacred Name mentioned without being ill afterwards?"

"Who says she can't?"

"Oh, I think that is admitted."

"Well—I should think she needed a tonic badly, then."

"She is in superb health."

"She can't be in superb mental health if she has delusions of that sort. There is nothing in that Name to have such an effect upon her and if it has such an effect upon her it proves that she has a delusion of which she could be cured."

"Interesting! Dr. Hale lent me a book on hallucinations lately, and some man who has made a study of such things says that one person in every ten has hallucinations—that is, either sees or hears something which doesn't exist. Doesn't that seem extraordinary?"

"Very. If true, I should say that one person in every ten was not in perfect mental health."

"This man, of course, suggests that what we think are hallucinations may be something else."

"Indigestion, for instance. In that case it is just as well for Dick Herrod that his engagement was broken. A bride with indigestion doesn't sound alluring. By the way, I heard a rumour the other day that she was engaged to Martin Aubrey. Heard anything about that?"

"Gerald! Aren't you provoking? Where did you hear that? And then to keep it to yourself for days!"

"I thought you were so sick of gossip about the girl," said Gerald comfortably. "Yes, they say Aubrey's engaged to her."

"Aubrey! Oh, she would never look at him."

"I wish he could hear you. My own opinion is that Mr. Aubrey thinks Miss Carne a pretty fortunate girl. What about Herrod, though? Do you suppose he found out that she had these—shall we say proclivities?—and that they proved too much for him?"

"I don't know, I'm sure. Gerald! if this isn't Agatha! Do let me bring her in here if you're not doing important work. She's always such fun."

Agatha had hardly entered the room, pecked at her cousin's cheek, and greeted Gerald in a preoccupied manner, than she exclaimed with a rush—

"Lynn! she's engaged!"

"Who is?"

"Miss Carne. To Mr. Aubrey this time!"

"I have just been telling Lynn so," said Gerald, laughing. "Wasn't it mean to forestall you, Agatha? She wouldn't believe me; perhaps she will you."

"Oh, it's true, Lynn. She received congratulations. Mr. Aubrey is quite delighted. You know, he has been in love with her for a long time. He was one of the first."

"So they are really engaged. Well, I am surprised."

"I wonder if she will get married in church," said Agatha in a peculiar voice, "or if she will have to be married before a Justice of the Peace, like a—an emigrant, isn't it?"

"Whatever do you mean?"

"Why, she never goes to church, Lynn. And they say that——"

"Agatha! Harold never goes to church either."

"He did when we were married," said Agatha huffily.

"And did he shriek or faint or anything of that sort?" asked Gerald with interest.

"Well, he didn't actually faint," put in Lynn, "but he looked as if he were on the verge of it. Mark my words, Agatha, instead of bothering about Miss Carne, I'd look up Harold's ancestry and find out if there isn't a witch concealed somewhere in the branches of his family tree."

Agatha looked annoyed. "You are always so silly, Lynn," she observed coldly. "I suppose that is intended to be clever."

"As for Theodora—did you ever hear of Peter the Great?"

"No," said Agatha innocently. "Who was he?"

"Oh, a king who lived a long time ago," said Lynn patiently. "But the point is that when he was a child he was dropped from a bridge into the water. After that for the rest of his life he could hardly bear the sound of wheels rumbling over a bridge. It used to drive him crazy."

"Oh! What a cowardly man!"

"He was noted for his ferocious courage. Now, if a warrior like that could go into a frenzy simply through hearing wheels, isn't it possible that Theo-

dora may go into another kind of frenzy through hearing certain words?"

Agatha yawned.

"I never cared for history," she confessed artlessly. "I always failed in it. I remember one year I only got twenty-six in the exam. It was disgraceful!" she continued, with a pleased smile. "Edith Tyndall, the head girl, got ninety-nine and a half. It was the best paper ever sent in. She married a curate and lives in the country somewhere. If I knew exactly where I should send her Baby's last year's things," she went on, her violet eyes luminous with thought. "They tell me there is a fashion even in infants' things, so I don't want to keep them. Besides, it is nice to be charitable and remember others not so fortunate as we are. 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' Though, perhaps, after all, I could sell them to the old-clothes man!" She relapsed into meditation, her upturned face resembling nothing so much as a Botticelli Madonna.

Gerald glanced at his wife and for a moment there was an expressive silence. Then Lynn walked to the window and remained there till she could speak steadily.

"To leave the old-clothes man and to return to Miss Carne," she went on at last, "there is a possibility that she has had a fright at some time in connection with the Sacred Name. You know, people are sometimes literally frightened to death. Now, if that is true—if grown-up, unimpressionable people can be frightened to death—why should not a child be frightened,

not to death, but so nearly that her nerves would never quite recover the shock and she would never again be normal on that one subject?"

"Rather good, that, Lynn!" said Gerald, struck by the thought.

"It is certainly very queer that Mr. Herrod should see a dog and break his collar bone," said Agatha, who had not paid the slightest attention to what Lynn had been saying, but had followed out a train of thought of her own. "When you remember that her ancestress used to take the form of a dog and run round all night, howling and wailing!"

"Do you suppose that Theodora takes the form of a dog and runs round all night, howling and wailing? Do you, Agatha?"

"I'm sure I don't know," said Agatha impartially. "But their washerwoman told me that she had seen a very queer-looking cat staring in the kitchen window the night after she had been doing the Carnes' washing; and that when she dropped the flatiron on the floor and made the sign of the Cross at it it dropped on the ground with a fearful howl. Now, what do you think of that?"

Gerald Amherst burst into a suppressed shout of delight.

"I think Miss Carne must have taken that shape in order to have an eye to the family washing," he observed. "Probably she howled at sight of a favourite blouse in tatters."

"And I think the washerwoman should have given the poor brute a saucer of milk," said Lynn indig-

nantly. "And I also think, Agatha, that it is queer of you to listen to such tales."

"I like that!" exclaimed Agatha. "You to say that! You who go round talking to all sorts of people—jailbirds and dirty children and men who are abusing their horses——"

"I don't discuss my friends with jailbirds and men who are ill-treating their horses," Lynn observed mildly.

"Neither do I. But Theodora's not my friend. When this mystery is cleared up I am quite ready to be her friend, but not before."

"In other words, you are quite ready to be her friend when she no longer needs one."

"When the mystery is cleared up."

"Well, you know we are surrounded by mystery from the cradle to the grave. Everything we think or do or say is mysterious, when you come to think about it."

"Yes, but not so mysterious as people turning into dogs and cats," said Agatha, unmoved. "Oh, I know you are cleverer than I, Lynn, about things that don't matter, like history, but I have more sense than you—I always had—and I know that I am right. I shouldn't mind that cat giving that queer howl, you know; but when it comes to Mr. Herrod breaking his collar bone—no, I don't think it's safe to have Theodora round, I really don't."

Lynn surveyed her small cousin in silence, reflecting on her train of admirers and then on Barrie's saying

that if there were only silly women enough to go round the good ones would never get a look in.

"I think it's a great pity to spread such senseless gossip," she said. "When you all come to your senses you will feel so foolish at having half believed such things."

"I never feel foolish," retorted Agatha indignantly. "The idea! I don't say that I believe all this about Theodora, I only say that I think it is safer to keep away from her. Surely I can choose my own friends."

"Surely."

"I think there are queerer things than witchcraft going on in Montreal at present. Much queerer things. People taking their servants to socials and getting young men to introduce them to. And then starting clubs where women get up and talk in public just like men. Last week they had a debate on child labour and a woman from the Southern States did almost all the talking. Most unfeminine! If women can get up in public and talk about things like that they might just as well go to the polls and vote."

"Just!"

"A woman presuming to tell men about the child labourers in the South! As if she could know anything about it."

"She had spent her life in working among them, and she knew more about the subject than anyone else who was there."

"Oh, I don't mind her knowing things," conceded Agatha generously. "Everyone to his taste. But I

don't like her talking in public. Why didn't she get a man to talk for her?"

"Because she had vocal organs of her own presumably and preferred to use them. I wonder you don't get your husband to eat for you, Agatha; it would be only consistent."

"He does," said Agatha comfortably. "He eats for us both; he often says so. Such an appetite! Well, Lynn, I suppose you approve of all these goings-on. I suppose you think it is quite the thing for people to go poking into the poor's homes, and teaching them all sorts of things about the care of their own children."

"Not at all. I think it's most unfeminine to save life and prevent illness, dirt, and cruelty. The really womanly thing would be to stay at home and let the children die by the thousands, as they used to."

"Oh, how heartless!" cried Agatha, looking shocked. "How can you say such things? And all because I disapproved of women being unfeminine. I don't wonder you sympathise with that girl breaking people's collar bones if that is the way you talk. But that is the worst of people going out into the world, the way you have always done; it makes them so hard. You won't mind my saying so; you know I was always one of the old-fashioned sort who liked to stay at home and look after my husband and children."

"No I didn't know that," returned her cousin. "When you were a girl you spent your time in dancing, dressing, and flirting—principally the latter. You

made a lot of your own clothes because you couldn't afford to pay a dressmaker to make them for you. Now that you have more money you seldom touch a needle, you spend your time shopping and gossiping, and you never see your children if you can help it—apparently. They are left almost entirely to the trained nurse whom you employ, which is an awfully good thing, as you are totally unfit to look after them yourself. I am not attacking you, Agatha, because as long as you can pay people to attend to your housekeeping and your children and they attend to them well—why, you have a right to do as you like, I suppose. But when it comes to your reproving me, who have one servant, do half the work of the house, all the housekeeping, and take almost entire charge of my children—when you reprove me, I say, for not letting my mind decay and my heart ossify in order to prove to imbeciles that I am a good wife and mother—why, it is a step too much. Don't you know that you and women like you who neither work in your homes nor outside owe an apology to Society for your very existence? I tell you, Agatha, that if you made up your mind to spend more time with those dear little children of yours, and to do a little for children and mothers less fortunate, you would feel less inclined to run round spreading ridiculous stories about strangers."

"At least, I shall never run round to you again," said Agatha, highly indignant. "The idea! One never knows what you will say next. My children and my husband are my one thought in life and it is a

pity all you clubwomen do not drop these fads and devote yourselves exclusively to quiet home pursuits——”

“Such as bridge and scandal?”

“Good-bye, Lynn,” said Agatha gently. She smiled with benevolent forgiveness at her cousin, gazed with a sort of heavenly reproach at Gerald, who had not defended her, and departed.

“By Jove, Lynn!” said Gerald, drawing a long breath. “How can anyone live and have so little intellect? But she’s very pretty. I hope she will not fulfil her threat of ‘not dropping in often.’ I don’t know when I’ve heard anything so delicious as her story of the cat who stared at the ironing.”

“She aggravated me beyond endurance to-day. What with the cat and the ‘domestic woman’ and the creature who dared to use her own vocal organs in public, I felt like getting up and stamping. I hope I wasn’t awfully rude—in my own house too!”

“Well, you were, rather. But it won’t do her any harm, my dear, so don’t worry. Stupid work, this is! How I wish I had Miss Carne for a model again. If I could paint her as the Witch of Carne arriving at the château—eh, Lynn! But I suppose it’s no use to think of it.”

CHAPTER IX

WHERE YOU EASED PAIN

"You who lie awake o' night,
Listening the rain,
Know, mayhap, it falls more light
Where you eased pain.

—VIRGINIA WOODWARD CLOUD.

NOTHING, certainly, is known better to all who know the strange planet which we inhabit than that facts are liars. Or, rather, that the obvious inferences which we draw from facts are liars. Father Munn said this to himself. Then he went to call on Theodora.

It has been proved many times in the history of the world that superstition spreads like disease. Montreal was in the clutches of a hysterical mania. The wildest, most fantastic stories found credence; the strangest, weirdest explanations were afloat. All these circled about a girl.

Father Munn tried to recapitulate, judicially, the evidence against her. Among the mass of fable he busied himself only with what was known to be fact. She was strange, she was silent; she made no effort to attract, yet drew men like a magnet; she was extraordinarily beautiful, and her beauty resembled that of a fabled ancestress.

He smiled. "Even in the days of the witch craze they would have found it difficult to burn Theodora on such evidence," he thought. "What next?"

Dick Herrod was engaged to her; the engagement was broken; he saw a dog, he fell, he broke his collar bone. Rather absurd to connect this with Theodora because of a fable about her ancestress.

And was this all?

Ah, no! When all was said and done, one thing yet remained to be accounted for—Theodora's effect on others.

No two persons seemed to agree as to what this effect was; all were conscious of it. A queer premonition of the unreal, said some; a peculiar shock, said others; a sort of faintness as though the familiar things of life were vanishing, was the definition of a third; while a fourth said openly that her flesh crept when in Theodora's presence as though in the presence of the sheeted dead. All nonsense, no doubt; still, perhaps, one could hardly afford to talk of nonsense in this age of unforeseen discoveries and receptive minds. At the same time it did not do to let one's imagination play vagaries. What was that excellent rule of Sherlock Holmes'? First, eliminate the impossible, and what remained, however improbable, was the truth? He would endeavour to bear this in mind.

It was clearly impossible then that Theodora Carne was an ordinary girl. It was certain that she differed from the average human being. The only important difference he had so far discovered lay in

her—should he call it aura?—her curiously vivid personality, which impressed imaginative people strangely.

Having gone so far he stopped. He was not being honest with himself. It was not that it impressed imaginative people strangely. It impressed severely matter-of-fact people strangely. It impressed British earls and peasants, Canadian society women and furnace tenders, clergymen of the Church of England and mad dogs.

Lord Haviland had made a brief call on the Carnes and had told Father Munn afterwards that the girl had given him "the shivers." He had then expressed his intention of remaining a few days longer in Montreal in order to see more of his "old friend's daughter,"—she was such a fascinating creature. Lord Haviland was sixty and what may be described as "a born bachelor." Duchesses and American plutocrats had angled for him in vain, these forty years. Theodora, Father Munn knew, never angled for anybody. Lord Haviland had not seen her again, however; why, the priest did not know.

Father Munn was a man to whom investigation had become a habit. The mystery did not daunt him; it was no mystery, he knew, could one but obtain a clue. He was too intelligent, too analytical, to take things at their surface value; he was not satisfied to label the young woman "abnormal" or "unbalanced" and drop the matter. He knew that mankind was too profound, too many-sided a thing to be docketed and laid to one side. Much must be known, much dis-

covered, before the mystery of Theodora could be satisfactorily explained.

He was exceedingly sensitive to impressions, and psychological studies leaning to the occult had always had a fascination for him. Probably, he reflected, the answer to this particular puzzle lay somewhere hidden in the occult—those mysterious regions where, perhaps, most of what we do not understand is hidden. Also where, perhaps, nothing of much importance is hidden.

One thing was certain. He had felt it; he knew it as surely as though he had received definite proof of it. Behind that superb form, that noble presence, lay something hidden and dangerous. Wild and wicked elements raged in that silent heart. He believed that though slow to anger she would be terrible in retribution. Watch out, he had always said, for the man or woman who does not voice his thoughts, or express himself in art. We do not know how much wickedness runs out through the tense fingers of the musician, the artist, the poet; we do not know how many murderous instincts are rendered null by tears, by shrieks, by shrill, senseless reproaches. Dismiss the artist, the talker, from your mind, but watch carefully the speechless man. Do not anger him. Sooner or later the weakest has power; but only the silent, the brooding, use it in a terrible way. Father Munn had seen those still eyes of Theodora Carne's looking into the mad dog's; and nothing could efface them from his brain. He knew that, had those eyes been turned on him—but here he shivered and pushed

the thought away. She was an unfortunate girl and he would help her—if she would let him.

He had a reason for calling on Miss Carne to-day. It was not his intention to deliberately seek to "probe the heart of her mystery." He felt that his reason for calling was of the best; one that could not be confounded with curiosity; one that the most sceptical should respect.

Arrived at the Waite house, he sent his card up and lowered himself cautiously on a sofa, wincing a little as he sank. Something of an ascetic by habit, he vaguely distrusted down; and was always haunted by a suggestion of a nest of young kittens or birdlings when he came in contact with soft cushions. Indeed, this feeling amounted to an obsession with him, wherefore he "mortified the flesh" by deliberately picking out the softest easy-chairs. For which reason he was regarded in some quarters as a pious old hypocrite who loved to take his comfort.

A few moments passed before Theodora Carne glided into the drawing-room with those perfect motions which were more beautiful even than her beauty.

"How do you do," she said gravely, extending her hand. "My cousin and mother are out. They will be sorry to have missed you."

"It was you I chiefly wanted to see," said Father Munn frankly.

"Thank you. I hope I shall not bore you, after that."

"If you do, I'll not stay. There are enough boring duties in connection with a priest's life without his

adding superfluous ones. But you will not bore me, never fear, Miss Theodora."

Theodora smiled perfunctorily and said nothing. She lowered her eyes, and when she raised them a moment later Father Munn was struck by their look of hidden pain. Also he was conscious—not for the first time, when in her company,—of a strange, indefinable feeling of panic; an impulse that urged him to frame some excuse and leave abruptly. His jaw took a certain set.

"Do you know, Miss Theodora," he said abruptly, "that you have an extraordinary effect on me?"

"Yes?"

That was all; but Father Munn stopped. He had a feeling that her soul had withdrawn into the dark places, and that his soul could not follow.

"Forgive me," he said; though, ten minutes later, he wondered for what he had asked forgiveness. "I did not call to-day to talk personalities; I am a beggar; a beggar for poor mothers who cannot beg for themselves; a beggar for helpless children who have a right to life and happiness. May I count on you?"

"Yes," she answered listlessly. "A moment. I will get my cheque-book."

"I want more than a cheque-book, Miss Carne—much more. Among my parishioners are many to whom the sight of a beautiful young woman like you would be a godsend. They would do for her what they would not do for others. I want you to help me with some of my most difficult and delicate work."

Theodora did not reply, and studied the rug at her

feet attentively. Father Munn, in the midst of his appeal, was conscious of the beauty of the low Greek brow melting imperceptibly into the straight Greek nose, a thing to please an artist.

"I want you to help me with the children," he pursued gently. "In a world so full of ingratitude and pain is it not pleasant to know that there are little guileless souls who repay every slight benefit with unlimited recognition and love? Is it not comforting to know that there are children in the world?"

"Not to me," said Theodora. "They all hate me."

The clergyman paused, startled. Something seemed to have risen from within the depths of her soul and to have spoken through her voice. He felt that he was on the brink of a discovery; he longed to penetrate it, longed to bear comfort to the prisoned spirit, yet felt, as we have all felt, the awful solitariness of life, life that brings us close, so close to our beloved ones, yet leaves us thousands of miles away, with the deep cold seas of loneliness and misunderstanding roaring between. More and more he determined that he would stem the waves; would find what strange blight lay on her, poisoning her soul, repelling friends and lovers, and leaving her alone and lonely in the midst of life.

"You cannot mean that," he said gently. "Why should they hate you? You who are so young and kind and beautiful?"

"I am beautiful," answered Theodora, after a short pause, "I am young. Why do you think that I am kind?"

"I would be willing to swear to it," he answered emphatically. "I am not often mistaken in anyone, Miss Carne, and I cannot imagine you doing a cruel thing—to a child or an animal, at least," he added, after an imperceptible pause.

"To a child or an animal!" she repeated slowly.

"I could imagine you doing cruel things to those whom you disliked," admitted Father Munn, feeling that the words were being dragged from him against his will.

Theodora seemed as though struggling for words. It was strange to see this proud and stately young goddess hesitating, almost as though silence were her element and speech a desecration. Now, for the first time since Father Munn had known her, she spoke at length.

"You are a good man," she said slowly. "Perhaps you are not always a wise man. You should be careful how you issue certificates of character. Some day you may find yourself in the position of having guaranteed that somebody's coal is milk-white in hue, or that somebody else's prussic acid will not harm a newborn babe. Why do you trouble about me? I know what you want. You want to help me and to know why I need help. But you cannot."

"Why not?"

"Because—you and I inhabit different spheres. There is a reason, a sufficient and horrible reason, why you, a clergyman, can have no dealings with me."

Father Munn drew a long breath. At last he was touching solid ground.

"Miss Carne," he said earnestly. "I do not want to force your confidence. But, when you speak to me, you must remember that I am a Christian. There can be no reason why I should not help you, nor you me. What do you think Christianity is?"

She started, and spoke vehemently.

"Do not—I do not want to listen—I implore you to talk about something else—there are reasons why I——"

He leaned forward, looking intently at her.

"Theodora," he said in a low voice, "Christianity is understanding—understanding of others. It is trying to find out what queer freak of ancestry, what cruel lack of education, has brought out certain traits in our companions. It is trying to see that their weaknesses, whether inherited or the result of environment, are deserving of our sympathy. Now—won't you trust me?"

"I—cannot."

"Will you trust me sufficiently to work with me among the poor?"

She laughed—a harsh, discordant laugh.

"You don't understand," she said. "When you know me you will not wish to be my friend. Let us end this. Suppose I confess that, if you and I were to be friends, you would have to promise solemnly never to allude before me to——"

"To?"

She paused a moment.

"If you wish to know me," she said calmly, her dark, cavernous eyes peering mockingly into his face,

"if you wish to see me, you will have to promise—you will have to remember that if you mention the—the Name——"

Suddenly her voice was inaudible, her face ghastly and fearful. "I think I will not finish," she said faintly.

"Yes—finish. If I mention the Name——"

"The Name of the—the Being whom you worship——"

"Yes."

"If you mention it I—I shall probably kill you. That is all."

"Not quite all," said Father Munn, very deliberately. "You mean that if I mention it you will kill me if I do not kill you first by naming it? Is not that so?"

A look of fear crept into her eyes. "How do you know?" she asked in a strained voice.

"A clergyman must know many things if he is to succeed in his work. Well! Is that all?"

"All?"

"I mean, have you any other condition to make?"

"But—but you do not mean that, after what I have said, you will still want—to be my friend?"

"Why not?"

"My dear child," he went on, as she stared at him in amazement. "My Master does not need naming. I do his work when possible; I name Him to His friends—to those who love Him. But it is not necessary to speak of Him to others. 'By their fruits ye shall know them,' were His words. I concern myself

with the works which I think He would have me do, and I leave the rest with Him. Do you think that He would wish me to leave you friendless because, for some reason which I do not understand, you do not wish to hear His name? You do Him injustice. Indeed, indeed, you are judging Him by purely human standards."

The intensity of amazement in Theodora's great eyes was almost terrible.

"You think," she said, at last, "you believe that—that—you think that, even though I cannot hear His Name, that I am not necessarily cursed—shut off? Oh, you don't mean it, you can't, you can't! You do not know——" She sprang to her feet, then, to Father Munn's consternation and amazement, burst into a passion of soundless weeping. Her shoulders shook, her slim frame trembled with the intensity of her feeling; yet her eyes were dry. He went timidly up to her at last, and laid his hand on her shaking shoulders.

"Cry," he said gently. "Cry, my child. It will relieve you. Weep!"

She removed her hands from her white face, and looked up at him, as though her soul were looking from a grave.

"I cannot weep!" she said.

CHAPTER X

THE "RIBS" CONVERSE

"The whole world was made for Man, but the twelfth part of Man for Woman. Man is the whole world and the breath of God; Woman, the rib and the crooked piece of Man."

"The Religio Medico."

—SIR THOMAS BROWNE

YOUR Aunt Joanna," said Mrs. Hadwell thoughtfully, "is probably the most unpleasant person on the planet. Still, my dear, it doesn't follow that she is always wrong."

"Oh, come now! there are worse people than my Aunt Joanna, Del!"

"Not in this world, Lynn. There may be another and more awful planet inhabited by worse people than your Aunt Joanna, but I trust that, wicked though I am, I am not quite bad enough to be sent there on my demise. But, as I said, even if your adopted aunt is a terror it doesn't follow that she is always wrong. Does it, Dr. Hale? And she seems to feel about Miss Carne just as everyone else does."

"And how," asked Dr. Hale slowly, "does everyone else feel?"

Mrs. Amherst laughed and interrupted. "Don't, please, let us touch on Miss Carne just yet!" she implored. "I am willing to lay a wager that once we

get to Father Munn's we shall talk of nothing else all afternoon. The dear old man! I do love his tea-parties. Wasn't it nice of him to ask us all together? I do wish Gerald could have come, too, but these bright afternoons are too precious for an artist to waste. Oh, here comes Mrs. Waite. You won't mind if I stop and talk to her, will you? I haven't seen her for an age."

"Who is Mrs. Waite?"

"Well, that's rather a long story. Suffice it to say she's one of the best women I have ever known."

"Ah!"

"Probably you will be more interested when I tell you that she is the cousin and hostess of the wonderful English beauty whom everybody's so interested in, and whom we were just discussing."

"Ah!"

Lynn laughed mischievously. "That almost atones for her being estimable, doesn't it?"

"Well, I confess I don't care much for people who are estimable unless they disguise it very cleverly. Now you are estimable, but no one would ever think it from your clothes. But *this* woman—oh, yes, I think that anyone might reasonably suspect her of being estimable and respectable and worthy and——"

"Hush! here she comes. Mrs. Waite! how do you do!"

Dr. Hale, acknowledging a hasty introduction, received an impression of a personality which he mentally characterized as "wooden." He watched with surprise both the enthusiastic greetings of his two

friends and the reception of these greetings by the new arrival. Mrs. Hadwell and Mrs. Amherst were curious to know whether Mrs. Waite had any clue to the personality of an anonymous benefactor who had, in the past few months, worked great changes in Montreal, but who preferred to remain unknown. "What do you think of it all?" they asked.

"What do I think?" repeated Mrs. Waite slowly.

"Yes. You go about and see so much—surely you must have an opinion. I think it is a woman who has done it all, and Dr. Hale insists that it must be a man," said Mrs. Amherst. "Now what do *you* think?"

"I think," said Mrs. Waite in the colourless, tired voice which characterized her, "I think—that what has been done is so slight, so pitiful, as hardly to merit attention, much less praise."

"Why, Mrs. Waite?"

"I think," she went on in the same even tones, "that anyone who goes about in this city and sees the suffering, the sin, the cruelty—the hopeless, shameful, totally unnecessary cruelty—and then praises the person who has succeeded in partially obliterating a few of the most deadly stains—I think——" She stopped. Her voice trailed off inaudibly.

"I think," she resumed coldly, after a moment's pause, "that what has been done is a flash in the pan—a mere scratch on the surface. It matters little whether it was a man or a woman; it does small credit to either."

"So that is a cousin of the beautiful Miss Carne," said Dr. Hale musingly, as they retraced their steps.

"Who would have believed it? Do you know, Mrs. Amherst, I have seldom taken so strong a dislike to anyone at a first meeting."

"How does she impress you? Speak frankly; I am curious."

"As cold, carping, unintellectual, and—well, negative. Thoroughly dislikeable."

"She is not intellectual, nor is she attractive. But she has a heart of gold and I respect her more than I do any other human being. I am quite aware, though, that if I did not know her through and through I should dislike her just as much as you do—probably more. For I love good looks and mental brilliancy and anyone more lacking in those two attributes than my dear Mrs. Waite I allow it would be hard to find."

"And she is Miss Carne's cousin?"

"Yes. Or, rather, Miss Carne's father's cousin. You admire her?"

"Miss Carne? Yes."

The word seemed to carry something with it.

Ten minutes later Father Munn, Mrs. Amherst, and Mrs. Hadwell gathered about a blazing fire in the clergyman's library, while Dr. Hale and Dr. Schmidt, somewhat in the background, examined Father Munn's books with that lack of ceremony which Father Munn always seemed to inspire.

They turned as a few words of Mrs. Hadwell's caught their ear.

"—but, as I say, unpleasant or not unpleasant, Mrs.

Bilkins appears to feel just as everyone else does about Miss Carne."

"And how," asked Father Munn as Dr. Hale had asked before, "how does everyone else feel?"

"Oh, Father Munn. You must have heard the stories that are going round."

"Such as?" suggested the clergyman.

"They say," said Mrs. Hadwell categorically, "that she is a vampire, a familiar spirit, the reincarnation of her great-great-grandmother, and a hardened flirt. The last doesn't matter, of course, on account of being true—but people are dreadfully exercised about the former. Especially Mrs. Bilkins!"

"And who is Mrs. Bilkins?" asked Dr. Hale in his turn.

"Mrs. Bilkins, as I said a few moments ago, is probably the most unpleasant person on the planet. Incidentally she is a woman of fifty, an ardent lover of a cat only less detestable than herself, a kind of pretended aunt of Mrs. Amherst's, a devout hater of myself, and—very incidentally, indeed—the wife of Abernethy L. Bilkins, Esq., manager of the Mountain Bank."

"Del, I can't allow you to describe my Aunt Joanna in that fashion," exclaimed Mrs. Amherst, laughing, but half vexed. "As a matter of fact, Dr. Hale, she is a most estimable woman, kind-hearted, charitable, and—and—but perhaps a little inclined to gossip. And Miss Carne does produce a strange impression on people who don't know her."

"What about people who do know her?"

"When I first met her," returned Lynn slowly, "I fancied things myself. But now that I know her fairly well I—I——"

"Well?"

"I don't feel quite the same. These queer impressions vanish as one sees more of her."

"Not with me!" said Mrs. Hadwell positively. "And not with anyone else I know. Even Agatha says she 'gives her the creeps.'"

"Oh, any good-looking woman would give Mrs. Lighton the 'creeps,' I should imagine," said Dr. Hale unkindly.

"People who are better looking than I are very apt to give me the 'creeps,'" confessed Mrs. Hadwell cheerfully, "but not this brand of 'creeps.' These are real creeps—bogey, someone-walking-over-my-grave, spirit-rapping creeps—the kind of creeps that make you want to run and turn on all the electric lights and drink champagne."

"Very nice creeps, I should say," opined the doctor, laughing. "Anything else?"

"Well—no one likes to say it but myself," said Mrs. Hadwell boldly, "but everyone who falls in love with her has an accident of some sort."

"Oh!" commented the doctor, smiling a curious little twisted smile.

"Well, if that isn't the way stories go!" exclaimed Lynn vexedly, "the girl has been engaged only once—to Mr. Herrod—and when the engagement was broken he went ski-ing in Ste. Agathe and fell down and broke his collar bone. And now 'everyone who

falls in love with her has an accident.' If that isn't the best!"

"You mean to say that she is not engaged now to Dick Herrod?" inquired Dr. Hale sharply.

"No," exclaimed Del Hadwell, with a gust of laughter. "She is engaged to Martin Aubrey."

The doctor's brow darkened in a displeased fashion. "She must be rather a changeable young lady," he said stiffly. "What was the cause of the broken engagement?"

"Presumably Martin Aubrey. A poor reason, I will allow, but the only apparent one."

"Del, because you are a dwarf yourself you always seem to think that there must be something the matter with small people. Look here! It isn't fair to throw Father Munn's cushions around in that fashion. Sit up like a lady now, and tell us whether you have any other reason for objecting to Martin Aubrey beyond the fact that he is much the same height as yourself."

"He is the pink of fashion——"

"So are you."

"He is unbearably conceited——"

"So are you."

"And I think he has a mean, paltry soul."

"I thought you didn't believe in souls."

"Only when I am having tea with a clergyman."

"And so she is engaged to Martin Aubrey," repeated Dr. Hale, taking no heed of the conversation that had followed this statement. "And she threw Herrod over for a little shrimp like that. Extraordinary!"

"Little shrimp! Dr. Hale, must I explain once

more that it is not a sin for a man to be small of stature—that it is not even a disgrace, as you and Mrs. Hadwell seem to think.”

“I beg your pardon,” said the doctor, starting. “I have been working pretty hard lately and I fancy that I am stupid. What were you saying?”

Mrs. Amherst looked at him in silence. Father Munn intervened.

“People talk a good deal about Miss Carne, then, and not always pleasantly? I suppose not. One does not like to hear of a young lady breaking an engagement so suddenly and becoming engaged to another man so shortly after.”

“No. One admires her nerve, though, and envies her enterprise. Seriously, Father Munn, people might disapprove of Theodora’s too frequent engagements, but I don’t really think that that has much to do with the way she is regarded.”

“And how is she regarded?”

“Well, ever since that dinner where Lord Haviland told us about the family legend a large number of people believe that she is a sorceress or a Witch or something.”

“Impossible!” exclaimed Dr. Hale loudly. “Surely, in the twentieth century, such idiocy is inconceivable.”

Dr. Schmidt, who had been smoking silently, turned and regarded him.

“I should like your definition of idiocy,” he said, with interest.

“What? Don’t you think it is idiocy?”

“That people should believe a modern girl to be a

sorceress? It sounds absurd enough. But one would have to know what they meant by the word 'sorceress,' and what you mean by the word 'idiocy.' Being a German, you see, I require exact definitions."

"Give Dr. Schmidt an exact definition of 'Woman Explained,' Lynn," said Father Munn, chuckling.

"Idiocy!" promptly exclaimed Mrs. Amherst.

"Therefore a definition of idiocy would be 'Woman Explained,'" said the clergyman cheerfully. "And in an hour or so you will be able to give us a definition of its author—for he will be with us shortly."

"What? Prof. Lant?"

"The same."

"The man who wrote 'Woman Explained'?" inquired Dr. Hale, with interest.

"Even so."

"What was his explanation?" inquired Dr. Schmidt.

"He explained that she was a pretty poor specimen," said Mrs. Hadwell seriously. "So she would be if she were anything like what he thinks her!"

"A pretty poor specimen!" repeated Dr. Schmidt uncertainly.

"A sort of glorified human saucepan for whom he had a deep and abiding respect, despite the fact that she was 'heartless, mindless, unsympathetic, unmoral, non-moral, too mean even to know when she was committing a meanness,' and a few other pleasant things," said Lynn.

"And in the next breath he had the cheek to say that she must remain 'sister to the flowers.' Poor flowers! What have they done to him, I wonder.

Well, if he respects the thing he thinks is a woman I have a deep and unqualified disrespect for him," said Mrs. Hadwell. "But he is a nice man to talk to—not a bit like his books—and, some day, when I get time I am going to educate him," she added darkly.

"I can imagine how!" exclaimed Lynn, with a suppressed laugh.

"Don't you approve of my system? One of these days I shall write a book on 'Education' and it will be more widely read than Spencer's, too."

"I have no doubt of that, Mrs. Hadwell," said Father Munn, chuckling, "I shall buy a copy as soon as it appears."

"So will everyone who knows what is good for him."

"Del's system of education is simple, yet comprehensive," laughed Mrs. Amherst. "She believes in flattering a man till he sees that she is a sensible woman, and flirting with him till he perceives that she is faultless. Then she begins to teach him. About that stage I should get rid of him as quickly and quietly as possible; but we feel differently about these things."

"And so that would be the method you would pursue with Prof. Lant?" asked Father Munn, musingly. "I don't know. I think you would find him difficult to fool. He is too old a bird to be caught by chaff."

"No male bird is too old or too young to be caught by chaff," opined Mrs. Hadwell, comfortably. "There's my son, Egbert, for instance; he's only six and he's madly in love with the laundress."

"Like Lord Byron."

"Yes, or Lord Anybody Else. These biographies of famous men always amuse me. We are gravely informed that 'Mr. So-and-So, like Byron and other famous men, fell in love at an early age,' and it does sound so much better than if one said, 'Like Jones and Smith and nine men out of every ten our hero did not wait to come to years of discretion before making a fool of himself!'"

"Your theories are amusing, Del. But you know you couldn't manage to see enough of Prof. Lant to——"

"Why not, please?"

"Because he wouldn't be bothered with you. Don't you know what he thinks?—that a man who affects the society of women is degenerate—despised of men and detested of women!"

"What makes you think that he thinks that?" inquired Mrs. Hadwell, with a startled expression.

"Why, he says so."

"Oh!" she exclaimed, with a relieved expression. "Is that all? I daresay he does say so. He says an awful lot. I never can remember it all, and I don't suppose he can, himself. Anyway, Lynn, I think you are very uncharitable to assume that the poor man means what he says."

"You think he doesn't?"

"Why, if you talk to him alone for five minutes you will find him positively intelligent."

"Perhaps, then, he was suffering from indigestion when he tried to explain Woman. We will hope so."

If I thought he didn't mean that stuff I should feel differently about him."

"Oh, I don't know that he knew he didn't mean it," said Mrs. Hadwell, coolly. "Only analytical people realise how much they mean of what they say, and men seldom analyse, poor things! Besides, if he did mean it, what then? He wouldn't be a bit sillier than any other man. The only difference is that when these queer notions pop into his head, he seizes a pen and scribble-scrabbles till he gets them out of his system. It's much better, really it is! and then he isn't obliged to talk nonsense to one's face. I think that if the average husband were compelled to write at least one essay on Woman every morning before breakfast he would be ever so much better-tempered and more rational. As soon as I get a vote I'll see what can be done about it."

"There's the bell," said Father Munn, with the malicious enjoyment of a schoolboy. "Here he comes. Now, ladies, you will have a chance to get yourselves explained at first hand."

But the maid who appeared a moment later did not announce Prof. Lant, but, instead, handed a note to her master which he immediately opened and read.

"The maid tells me that you have friends in the library. You will excuse me, I know, for not joining you there; you know my horror of social gatherings. Besides, you said, particularly, that you wanted to see me in private. So if you can talk to me now, come to the little study downstairs; and if not, I shall understand.

AMY WAITE"

CHAPTER XI

TRYST WITH DARKNESS

"You who tryst with darkness hold,
Hush o' night hath proved,
Somewhere falls the snow more soft
Because you loved."

—VIRGINIA WOODWARD CLOUD.

YOU wished to see me?" asked Mrs. Waite, quietly, as Father Munn entered with outstretched hand.

"Very much. Very much indeed, Mrs. Waite."

"Won't your friends think it strange for you to leave them like this?"

"Not a bit. I am always doing erratic things," he answered, laughing. "They know that when I am ready to come back I shall come back, and in the meantime they are quite happy. Pull your chair up to the fire, won't you? The day is chilly. That's right. Now, my friend, I know you are one of those who do good in secret—don't interrupt! this is not persiflage; I have a point to which I shall come in my own good time. You are one of those ministering angels who move about in the guise of ordinary mortals, and by dint of untiring patience and self-denial bring comfort and relief to many hearts and homes."

He paused. She did not answer; only sat with an inexpressive countenance which might well have daunted any flatterer. Father Munn did not seem discomposed by it; he leaned back comfortably in his arm-chair, and folded the tips of his fingers together.

"We must consult, you and I," he said, slowly. "Hitherto there has been little work that we have done together that could not have been done as well by others, had they happened to think of it. To-day, I am about to propound to you a problem of a different colour; I am about to give you an opportunity to help me in a matter of the utmost importance; a matter, too, in which, I believe, only you can help me."

Still Mrs. Waite did not speak. Father Munn continued, eagerly.

"You are always generous with money, and with time. Will you be equally generous with your thoughts?"

She looked up at him for the first time with something approaching interest.

"With my thoughts?" she repeated, slowly.

"With your thoughts. I want your thoughts on a certain subject."

"I don't understand."

"Don't you?"

"You know," she spoke with an effort, "I am not clever. It is true I think of things—have thought of things—but few of them were original. And they were—they were practical things; you understand me? things that could be done—could be carried out. I don't believe that—that——"

"Well?"

"That my thoughts on most subjects would be of much value."

"We won't start an argument over that," he replied, smiling. "It happens, in this particular case, that your thoughts will be of the utmost value. May I have the benefit of them?"

"If you wish—certainly."

"Mrs. Waite!"—he spoke deliberately—"what are your thoughts regarding Theodora Carne?"

Mrs. Waite never started, never moved quickly at any time. Yet something in her attitude conveyed the impression of perplexity and embarrassment.

"You do not wish to answer," said Father Munn, looking at her closely.

"To tell the truth—no."

"Yet we are old and tried friends and you trust me. There must, therefore, be good and cogent reasons for your distaste."

"I do not know that." She spoke slowly, as though pondering.

"Perhaps, then, you may think that I have no right to inquire into family matters. Yet, Mrs. Waite, believe me, the matter is one of vital importance. I should not trouble you otherwise."

"You do not trouble me. But I find your question hard to answer."

"You do not know exactly what your own thoughts about her are, perhaps."

"Yes. I am not sure."

"Ah. If you could formulate your thoughts, you would have no objection to letting me know them?"

"None."

"Then the matter is comparatively simple. The case stands thus. Here is a girl, beautiful, young, well-born, refined, well-bred, with sufficient means, with a striking personality. Apparently she is somewhat conventional in her actions, and she is certainly sparing of speech. Yet, within a few months of her stay in a most prosaic matter-of-fact little city, that city is rife with tales about her—tales, most of which are so preposterous that one would refuse to credit them, were it not that circumstances point to there being at least a little truth in some of them. Now what do you make of all this?"

"I go out little." She spoke with an effort. "I hear little gossip. Also—about my young cousin—you must see that I should hear much less than you would."

"Naturally. But you have heard something."

"Oh, yes."

"And—have observed more, perhaps?"

She looked at him very thoughtfully for a moment. "Yes," she said at last, as though pondering. "Yes. I have observed—more."

"Ah!" he exclaimed, triumphantly. "You have observed more. Now what, Mrs. Waite, have you, living in the house with this mysterious girl and seeing her daily,—what have you, personally, observed?"

She leaned her hand on her cheek and stared at the carpet for a moment.

"She has a curious effect on animals," she said, at

last. "I have two dogs, as you know. They are never at ease when she is in the room."

"How do they show their uneasiness?"

"Rover fawns upon her. If he is lying down upstairs and she opens the front door, he always knows and stirs uncomfortably. Sometimes he gives a short growl as if annoyed; then he whines in a sort of propitiating manner. As soon as she enters the room he begins to growl and express a—well, a sort of servile pleasure, as though he were afraid of her, yet fascinated by her."

"Perhaps he is a man undergoing a dog incarnation," suggested Father Munn, laughing. "That seems to be her effect on a good many men. What about the other dog, Mrs. Waite?"

"Missie? Oh, she simply bristles and runs whenever Theodora approaches."

"H'm. Curious! What does Miss Theodora herself say about these manifestations?"

"Nothing. She has never remarked on the dogs, never attempted to caress them, or noticed them in any way."

"Does not that seem strange to you?"

"Not—not stranger than everything else about her."

"What else?"

Mrs. Waite thought. "Her attitude to her mother is stranger than anything else."

"How would you define it?"

"As unnatural. She is polite, considerate of her mother's wishes but, otherwise, her mother does not seem to exist for her. They seldom sit together and,

when they do—well, they are silent. There is no chatter, no confidential small talk such as is usual between mother and daughter.”

“Miss Theodora does not sew—or—or tat, or anything of that sort?” Father Munn vaguely inquired.

“Oh, no. She does not play cards, either, or draw, or play any instrument, or do anything that other girls do.”

“A most unusual young lady!” exclaimed Father Munn, with what sounded like enthusiasm. “But, Mrs. Waite, she and her mother must find their afternoons and evenings rather monotonous if they speak so little.”

“They see little of one another. Mrs. Carne is fond of quiet and likes to sit by the fire with a book, or to write letters in her own room. For exercise she takes a short walk occasionally and drives with me almost every day. Theodora, on the contrary, is very active and seldom stays at home. If she is not at a dance or a theatre she is receiving calls, and she takes a great deal of exercise, either walking, skating or riding. So you can see that she and her mother are seldom together.”

“That does not seem very usual in the case of a mother and an only daughter,” reflected Father Munn. “Do you think Theodora heartless, or only thoughtless?”

“I do not know what to think,” said Mrs. Waite, slowly. “However, it is only fair to Theodora to say that her mother is obviously uneasy in her society.”

"She does not look like a happy woman at any time—Mrs Carne!"

"She is not. I have seldom seen a more depressed person. When Theodora is out—and, at other times, when Theodora looks very happy—Mrs. Carne brightens a little. But she never seems cheerful."

"Mrs. Waite, will you excuse my asking how you came to invite the Carnes to your home. You did not know them, did you?"

"No. I had heard that the daughter was delicate and a source of anxiety, and some one who had met them in Sicily told me that they had spoken of visiting Canada. Geoffrey Carne was my cousin and had once done me a great kindness; therefore I was only too glad to think that I might be of service to his child and widow. I invited them to spend the entire winter if they wished, and to make my home theirs. I knew nothing of them beyond the fact that the daughter was very beautiful, had been in ill health, and that she and her mother travelled, continually."

"Theodora does not look as if she had ever suffered from ill health."

"She has never been ill in her life. People accounted for the incessant travelling in that way, that is all."

"Well, well! It is a curious situation, is it not? Does Mrs. Carne speak of her daughter to you, at all?"

"When they first arrived she often spoke of her in rather a conventional way, alluding to her admir-

ers and to the way in which she attracted attention everywhere. But she has not done it of late."

"Do you know why?"

"I think," said Mrs. Waite, half reluctantly, "that she tried at first to convey the impression that she was an ordinary proud mother and that Theodora was an ordinary flirting, dancing young lady. But now she does not find it necessary."

"You mean?"

"I think that she knows that it makes no difference to me what Theodora is, or why, and that the fact of not having to keep up a pretence about things is a great relief to her. But this is merely an impression."

"You know, of course, that there has been much curious gossip about Miss Carne, of late," said Father Munn, slowly. "You speak of her constant activities. Can you tell me whether she still receives the same attention and notice that she did, a month ago—after the mad dog episode, for instance?"

"I think that many people disapproved of her becoming engaged to Mr. Aubrey so soon after dismissing Mr. Herrod. I know that her mother felt it a good deal."

"Did she speak of it to you?"

"Oh, no. But she seemed downcast and uneasy. And I don't think she cares for Mr. Aubrey."

"Do you?"

"Not especially. But I see little of him. I am not fond of young men and I do not care for fashionable people."

"It is the weakest point in a strong character, Mrs. Waite," said the clergyman, earnestly, "that you 'do not care' for the rich, the fashionable, the sought-after. They need help and sympathy as much as the most overworked, anæmic drudge that you meet."

"That may be," she answered in a low voice. "But the latter has few friends, and so is glad to have me for one. And I can help her—or him, as the case may be. But I can't help Martin Aubrey or Dick Herrod or—and I am sorry for it—Theodora Carne. Nor, I fear, can you. I know your powers of sympathy and understanding; but, without crediting any of the vulgar gossip which is rife about the girl, I still feel——"

"Well?"

"That she is not quite canny," Mrs. Waite confessed, reluctantly. "I hate to say it, but she does not seem like a human being. And that is the stranger to me because I have never yet found another person who gave me quite that impression. You know that I have talked with people who have thieved, who have murdered, who have committed grave crimes; yet always there remained traces of the human; one felt that one was talking to one of one's own species. Only with her it is different."

"Perhaps she really belongs to Mars or Venus," suggested the other, smiling, "and has been dropped here by accident."

"Then," said Mrs. Waite, involuntarily, "I wish she would return where she belongs."

"Why, Mrs. Waite!"

"You asked for my real thoughts, Father Munn. I did not know what they were till I began to formulate them. But they have taken shape in my mind as we have talked, and I now tell you that, beautiful and charming as Theodora Carne undoubtedly is, I believe that she will have a bad effect on anyone who comes in contact with her. I feel sorry for her mother, for Mr. Herrod, for Mr. Aubrey. I don't know why I do, but I do. And, Father Munn——"

"Well, my dear!"

"I have never tried to hinder you in the discharge of your duty, have I? I have never put obstacles in your way—not even when you insisted on interviewing that half-crazed man who had nearly killed his wife?"

"I made him come with me, too, didn't I?" asked Father Munn, with relish. "I proved that it wasn't necessary to shoot or maim a half-witted murderer."

"You did. But only I of all your friends thought that you would come from that room alive."

"Yet here I am."

"Exactly. And, remembering that I did not try to dissuade you on that occasion, Father Munn, you will probably attach some importance to my words when I ask you, now, most solemnly, to let Theodora Carne alone."

There was a brief silence.

"Why?" he asked then.

"Because—that girl will do you an injury. She is not like other people. It is not safe to meddle with

her. I don't know why I think this, but I was never so convinced of anything in my life."

"You think that she may send a hound to break my collar bone?" inquired Father Munn, laughing.

"I think that she may do worse things. I think that she may have powers such as we do not even suspect the existence of. And I think that underneath that icy exterior may be something—I don't know just what—something black, bitter, poisonous, sleeping like a serpent coiled at her heart and ready to wake and sting. Watch what happens in the next six months and tell me if I am not right."

Father Munn slowly knocked his pipe against the fender and said nothing for a moment.

"It is a universal impression, evidently," he said then. "A universal impression. You, me, Mrs. Bilkins, Mrs. Lighton—amazing! You really feel that this pretty, silent girl is dangerous in some unexplained fashion, Mrs. Waite?"

"I do; and I implore you to keep away from her."

He looked at her in silence for a few moments as though meditating.

"If this girl has a black drop in her heart," he said at last, deliberately, "if there is something within her that is unloving and hurtful—something which makes her dangerous to others and which, therefore, makes right living or happiness impossible to her—it is certainly my duty as a priest of God to give her a wide berth, is it not?"

Mrs. Waite was silent.

"If," he continued, refilling his pipe and carefully

adjusting the tobacco, "if Christ were here, in Montreal, to-day, I feel convinced that he would avoid Theodora Carne. Evil is so much more powerful than good; Satan is so much more to be feared than God; that I believe Christ would carefully avoid all contact with anyone who needed help or reformation—and would go to dine with the Governor-General, instead. Don't you agree with me, Mrs. Waite?"

His companion made no answer.

"If," he continued, more gravely, "if Theodora is a menace to herself and others and if she may be dangerous to me when I attempt—as I shall—to cure her disease; for sin is disease, sometimes mental, sometimes physical, but always disease; then it becomes an imperative duty to do what I had already determined upon—seek out her friendship and insist on having it. And, for the rest; partly I agree with you, Mrs. Waite, and partly I do not. I am, as you know, far from being a materialist; I realise that we are trembling on the brink of great discoveries. Materialism has completely failed to explain the universe, and even the British Medical Journal now discusses the occult seriously. Evidences of the superphysical confront us on all sides. What is called 'the occult' to-day will probably be, in fifty years' time, the commonly accepted science of text-books. Men must understand life before they can master it. It is possible that I may perish in my effort to understand Theodora Carne; but that is a risk only a coward could refuse to run. Besides, though I look on all sides of a question—I often think that we are all making a

great to-do over very little. The disease, though obscure, may be a simple one; the remedy, complete and obvious. You are aware that a hundred years ago we were hanging hungry children?"

She shuddered. "Yes."

"That fifty years ago we were beating them cruelly?"

"Yes."

"That ten years ago we were sending them to reformatories?"

"Yes."

"Do you know what we are doing with them now?"

"Why—no, I don't think I understand you."

"We are educating the majority. But in extreme cases of 'crime' and 'delinquency' we are—performing operations on the skull."

She looked up. "Yes—of course—I remember."

"Then do not forget, Mrs. Waite, that trepanning has cast a new light on theology; and do not forget that there may be spiritual and mental trepanning, and that, as Browning puts it,—

"I sometimes think the sun will pierce
The thickest cloud . . .
That what began well can't end worst,
Nor what God blessed once prove accurst."

CHAPTER XII

ONCE-SOWN SEED

"Of once-sown seed who knoweth what the crop is?"

—ERIC MACKAYE.

THESE are the facts," said Father Munn. "This much I have ascertained. I think I have a right to speak of them to a man like you who may be able to throw some light on them, and help matters."

Dr. Schmidt smoked in silence. The two were seated in Dr. Schmidt's study, where they had withdrawn after an early lunch together.

"She believes that she cannot hear that Word—without terrible danger. If we are to believe the story from Italy the sound of the Name sent her into convulsions. If we are to believe the English nursemaid of whom Lord Haviland told us, she was not allowed to say prayers when a child. Mrs. Bilkins' cook spoke of the Evil Eye in connection with her Egyptian sojourn, and also of the Black Art. She must have displayed terrifying powers of one kind or another while there. Of course the story of the hound and the broken collar bone is poppycock——"

Dr. Schmidt removed the pipe from between his teeth, and spoke.

"No such thing as poppycock," he observed, laconically.

"Then you really think——"

"I think nothing till I have my data. But I know that it is not good to say 'poppycock' to what we do not understand. 'Poppycock' has kept this old world lagging behind the worlds where 'poppycock' is not. Continue, my friend!"

"Wouldn't you say 'poppycock' to the cat that looked into the laundress' kitchen, and frightened her to death?"

"It was probably a cat. But, if Miss Carne were a skilled hypnotist and would so far degrade her skill, she could make the washerwoman see a cat or a serpent with blue eyes or a devil in a slit skirt. It is not probable that she would be so foolish. Only one thing of all that you tell me is really significant or unusual—the fainting at the Name. All the rest is of a simplicity—easily explained."

"What do you think of that—the hallucination about the Name?"

Dr. Schmidt smoked in silence.

"There was Peter the Great," he observed, meditatively. "And James the First. Also——"

"Schmidt," said the other, solemnly, "you are elliptical——"

"Is it a bad name that you call me? I am not familiar with it."

"No, not a bad name, exactly. You resemble our English poet, Browning. He always thought at lightning speed, and neglected to put most of his thoughts down. He would write the beginning of a thought,

leave out the middle, refer vaguely to the end, and expect the public to guess what lay between."

"Ah!" said the professor tolerantly, "a poet. They are children. I have little time for such play. My time is taken up with studying realities; there are so many realities in the world, and all deserve attention. Above all, the scientist must be broad."

"Above all, yes. You do not think, then, that Life and Death, Love and Hate, Religion and Agnosticism, are realities?"

"What do you mean?"

"That they are what the poet deals with and that that is the reason why a poet, dealing with the principal realities of life, is a power to be reckoned with for good or evil. But, forgive me, Dr. Schmidt; I know your time is valuable, so we won't stop to discuss that. I am too much interested in what you said of Miss Carne. When I interrupted you, you were speaking of Peter the Great and James the First as though they had some connection with the problem."

"I was considering," said Schmidt, quietly, "what could account for the obsession—if obsession it is. What is the mother like?"

"A little, sad, grey thing, very well-bred and painfully quiet. She says almost less than Theodora but does not look as though she thought as much."

"She may think more. But that does not help us. She is nervous—no?"

"I have no means of judging."

"It does not matter," said Schmidt, musing. "The effect on the Scottish Queen must have been great,

yet she faced the headsman's axe with a smile, years after. While he—her son——”

“Explain, won't you? Remember that I am not a mind-reader, Schmidt.”

“I was thinking of the case of James the First. You remember the stabbing of Rizzio before his mother?”

“Perfectly.”

“You also know, no doubt, that James could never bear the sight of steel.”

“I had not remembered that. How extraordinary! But do you mean to tell me, then——”

“It was some months before James' birth that Rizzio was stabbed by Darnley and others in front of Mary.”

“It was?”

The clergyman's voice held a queer, purring note which caused the scientist to look at him with surprise.

“How much,” he observed, gently, “how very much she must have enjoyed helping Bothwell to blow Darnley into eternity a little later on. I wish I had been there to lend a hand!”

Dr. Schmidt looked at him with interest.

“You are a clergyman—yes?”

“A clergyman, yes. But a man, first. And to think that people should dare to call Mary a murderess! The instinct that caused her to plot the death of Darnley was a divinely appointed instinct, the instinct that keeps the world clean and livable, the in-

stinct that leads to the extermination of vermin. His own child, too!"

"He was her husband," observed Schmidt, judicially.

"He was a corpse not long after," observed Father Munn, an unclerical light gleaming in his eye.

"You speak of vermin. Yet—who made the vermin?"

"I don't know. Who can say?"

"Can the vermin help being vermin? Did it ask for life?"

"We don't know that, either."

"I kill vermin because I believe in my right to kill anything that interferes with me that is weak enough to be killed. But how do you reconcile the killing of vermin with your religion? That is what often puzzles me. Why has not a rat as much right to life as you have? And, even if we dismiss rats from the argument—why has not a cow?"

"Don't you think that Man is ruler of the universe and that he has a right to anything that will help him to survive?"

"I do. Because Man is the strongest animal on the planet. If Mars or Venus dislodged a million superior beings to-morrow they would think the same and we should have to go. It has nothing to do with religion; it is utterly contrary to your religion. But I like to hear you talk. You are a man, anyway."

"Of course I am a man!" cried Father Munn, indignantly. "The stuff people talk on that subject always infuriates me. Don't you suppose it takes at

least as much manhood to be a clergyman as to be a bank clerk or a railway porter?"

"Yes—but we must return to the lady—the strange lady. We must determine not to wander into side tracks, or we shall never finish our discussion."

"Quite right! We must stick to '*nos moutons*' strictly, after this. I think I see what you mean by citing the case of James the First. You mean that a pre-natal influence may have been at work."

"I should like to see the mother, yes, before making up my mind."

"Odd that so simple an explanation does not seem to have occurred to anyone. And most suggestive, your theory!"

"Mind! I do not say it is my theory. I throw it out as a feeler, merely. There are other solutions—Peter the Great, for instance! You remember?"

"To be sure! It's coming back to me. Wasn't he dropped from a bridge when an infant? Dropped into the water? And, after that, he couldn't bear the sound of water under a bridge, or something of that sort?"

"Exactly. You see the connection?"

"I do. But it doesn't sound so probable. What could have happened to make the Name so horrible to her that the sound of it almost drove life away?"

"I incline to a third solution."

"You do?"

The professor cleaned his pipe for a moment in silence. Then he lit it, and leaned comfortably back.

"See, now! I should not like to give this out in

public. They would say, 'The good German, he is mad!' or words to that effect. I say it to you, quietly, because you can, as the vulgar have it, hold your tongue. You understand?"

"Quite."

"I am a believer in re-incarnation, myself. It is incredible that our souls have but one life, and then vague existence elsewhere. It may be that we have only one life on earth—I greatly hope that it is so—and that then we go to brighter worlds. I do not know about that. It is also possible, of course, that we come back to life, when there is reason."

"You mean?"

"I mean that, all around us, there may be witches and wizards undergoing new experiences, doing penances for sins forgotten. I mean that it is possible that this pretty Theodora may be of an abnormal subliminal memory, so that she feels, without knowing why, that she is not as others. Without doubt, in the Middle Ages, she may have wrought great harm."

"You seriously believe that she may be her ancestress come to life?"

"I seriously believe that anything may be possible. 'All things are possible with God,' as the Bible has it. We do not know—we can only guess at the rules by which life is governed. Certainly, she is not as others; she knows it, others know it; she may have been sleeping since the fifteenth century and dreams may have disturbed her rest—dreams of her sins, of her shame at hearing the Name that she knew herself to have sinned against; these dreams may have followed her

into this, her present incarnation, and be disturbing now her subliminal consciousness. Such is possible. Not likely, you follow me, but possible."

"You amaze me. Do you, then, believe that she may have been a great sinner?"

"If a great sinner it was before her last incarnation. Great sinners do not know shame or remorse. Sins of the most shameful kind are committed carelessly without thought or penitence. Why, look you, I passed a few weeks lately this summer at a watering-place which shall be nameless. The man I stayed with told me that it is the custom of the gay sojourners to take their pet cats and dogs with them to the country. They return to town in September—and the pets stay behind. Yes. These creatures reared as babies, fed, washed, played with, adored, they stay behind—to perish of starvation, of thirst, of the claws of fiercer animals, of madness, of desolation. Meanwhile, in the city, these beings kneel in church in fine hats and high collars, praying—praying to the God of all creation, to the God who said, 'Be merciful that you may obtain mercy,' praying with smug faces, with satisfied souls. While they pray, the cat, the dog, they have made helpless from birth, is rushing about the woods, screaming with the madness of thirst, the pangs of starvation. God! How the Creator must laugh at the sound of the hymns."

"God forgive them! It is too true!"

"Forgive them? Do you ask that He forgive them? I should pray, if I prayed at all, for the privilege of torturing them as they have tortured others! How

else could one drive truth and understanding home to minds so brutish, souls so dead? But, after all, is not cruelty the law of the planet? We prey on others, they prey on us. Yet one's gorge rises at such refinement of cruelty as that; and then that these beings should pose as kind and decent citizens—faugh! Well! we will hope that this is the only planet where Nature is 'red of tooth and claw'; we will hope that this earth is the only hell. And God grant that, when we reach a happier planet, we may have the mystery of the 'brute creation,' as we so politely term it, explained to us. God grant that we may know why these creatures so like yet so unlike ourselves are placed on earth to endure all that we endure, yet receive none of our consolations. But we wander far from the pretty Theodora. I was only saying that she was not a great sinner in her last incarnation because she knew shame and remorse and love. No, she was not a great sinner. But the fact that she felt herself to be so showed that she was passing through a purification. Yes. And now she comes, perhaps, to be purified again. We do not know. It is all the fancy of a fool, perhaps. But we do not know."

"But, Schmidt! The stories of her witchcraft? Of her causing death and accident?"

"Look at Montreal—your commercial, laughing, sporting city! Here comes a girl with a strange eye; she has admirers; one sees a dog and breaks a bone, and presto! the whole town is in an uproar, because of a legend. How is it possible that if people such as these, living to-day, could go so far in belief on such

slight grounds—how is it possible, I say, that ignorant peasants could escape? Besides——”

“Well?”

“Occult powers are uncertain. In the occult I include all not well understood, such as hypnotism, trance causing, and so on. That is really what we mean by occult—not well understood. You comprehend me. But, if occult powers were certain every hypnotist could be a Napoleon, a Cæsar. Merely would he wave his hand and say, ‘Belong to me, England, France—the world!’ and they would belong until a stronger ousted him. Even, however, where the occult powers are uncertain, they are terribly potent. You think that a woman who could will from a distance could not will death or disaster to a man she hated? Could not print on his brain a picture terrifying and distinct? Ah, yes—the Witch may have done much—much! Still, she was not the hardened in sin who has no imagination, therefore no conscience. She knew that she sinned. You remember—she wept over the cradles of her sons. No hardened sinner, believe me. What is it, Herr Father?”

“Did Haviland say that—that she wept over the cradles of her sons?”

“Yes. Don’t you remember? Or did he tell me afterwards when we were discussing the tale?”

“I don’t think he said so before me. Then why——”

“Well?”

“Why, then, should Theodora believe that she can-

not weep?" he said, slowly. "Has she other delusions besides this one?"

"She thinks that she cannot weep?" inquired the scientist with interest. "I must make a note of that. It may not be of importance, and then, again, it may just settle the question of whether—but of what use to talk until we can collect fresh data? We have learned much from this talk, my friend—much."

"Perhaps. But is anything clear to you?"

"A little, yes. For one thing, she certainly has a deeply rooted belief in certain things about herself—whether rightly or wrongly, who can say? Then she is undoubtedly—almost undoubtedly—a hypnotist of some kind—perhaps partly unconscious. Further than that I cannot go. But that is much to know."

"Then you actually think——"

"I actually think that anything in this world is possible—yes. But I also think that many puzzling facts are capable of most matter-of-fact explanations. Ah! the housemaid. What is it, Bella?"

"A lady to see you, Sir."

She handed him a card on which was pencilled these words, "Mrs. Carne requests, as a great favour, a few words with Dr. Schmidt on a matter of deep importance."

Dr. Schmidt, with a stifled ejaculation, handed the card to Father Munn, who read it, silently.

"I shall have to ask you to withdraw, Herr Father," said his host. "I am sorry, for I had hoped to see more of you to-day. But this is too significant—this request—too pertinent to trifle with. It may be that

our talk has drawn her; it may be that she will say much—much. Good-day to you, Father Munn. I will tell you of our interview if it is of interest and if she is willing that I should. I feel—rightly or wrongly—that I am about to hear things of moment. Good-day.”

CHAPTER XIII

REAPING THE WHIRLWIND

"For they have sown the wind and they shall reap the whirlwind."—HOSHA.

MRS. CARNE entered Dr. Schmidt's study silently, and, in answer to his courteous invitation, took a seat. Then she raised her veil and looked at him, still without speaking. Her eyes were hauntingly sad; eyes in which lurked grief unspeakable, the grief of a torn heart. Dr. Schmidt felt the scientist within him replaced by the man. This woman was in trouble of some kind and she had come to him. He was touched by the trust and felt sympathy with the trouble. That it was real was evident.

"You are Mrs. Carne, are you not?" he inquired. "I can see that you have something to say to me. Is it not so?"

"Yes," answered his visitor, quietly.

"You will let me send for a cup of tea that we may the more comfortably discuss——"

She raised her hand as if in protest. "No," she begged. "I shall find it easier to speak if we are not interrupted. Please let us remain as we are."

She struggled for words. When they came they were not what he had expected.

"Have you children, Dr. Schmidt?"

"No," he answered, "I have thought, though, of what it must be to have a son—a daughter. They were denied me. My wife—she is dead. She died when we had been married a few months. And you?"

"I had a husband," she said with effort. "He is dead. And a daughter. She is alive. It is of her that I wish to speak. But it is difficult."

"How did you come to visit me?"

"Because," she answered, "Lord Haviland, when calling on me, a short time ago, described a dinner which I had been unable to attend, and told me of the guests. You were among them. He told me that you, in your travels and studies in the East, had come upon strange things. For one, that you had seen apparitions raised by Hindoos. He also told me that you had the terrible power—terrible, it seems to me—of impressing your will on others."

"It is true. But not terrible—unless wrongly used."

"He also spoke of crystal gazing. He said that you had caused people to see strange things in the crystal."

"He misunderstood me, madam. People—some few people—when gazing in the crystal ball have seen strange things. But these were wellings from the subconscious with which I had nothing to do. I place little reliance on the crystal. It is uncertain. So all things are that are connected with the occult. It is of them that you wish to speak?"

"Not exactly."

He moved his chair a little closer and gazed steadily into her face.

"I will tell you of what you wish to speak," he said, quietly. "You wish to speak of your daughter—the beautiful Theodora. You wish to tell me why she causes you grief, in what she differs from others, and to ask me the reason for these differences. Is it not so?"

A slight fear crept into her eyes. She bowed without speaking.

"You think that I have read your mind," he said. "It is not so. My mind is an acrobat. It moves so quickly in some directions that its processes impress the unknowing as magical. It is not the finest nor yet the strongest of minds, but it is of the most rapid. You give me certain data; I leap to the conclusion as a squirrel leaps from bough to bough. You see the squirrel in one place; he is in another before you see him move. But he has leapt; he has used no magic. You will now let me tell you more?"

She made a gesture of assent.

"So! You watch your child grow from infancy to womanhood; you find her beautiful, bewitching—ah, but she is not as others. You watch and wonder—you are afraid. Who is it that she resembles? To be a parent—is it not almost to be a fatalist? Yonder boy walks with a quick, proud step; so walked that uncle whose name is never spoken, whose grave is never visited. He smiles; and you see through a quick mist of tears, the baby aunt who died before she could lisp her own pretty name correctly. He frowns; and a choleric great-uncle who narrowly escaped being hanged for manslaughter leaps into

flesh once more. Your boy, your girl, is as a stage where various performers stride and strut. Yet sometimes—ah, there is the puzzle—sometimes a forbear whom you do not know—who lived, perhaps, a thousand years ago—appears on this stage. Then you are puzzled, frightened. You cry, ‘what is this?’ Ah, my good madam, it is nothing—perhaps. Again, perhaps, it is everything. What I must now know is—who is this performer whose actions have so troubled you? Have you a clue?”

She spoke, faintly.

“It is too absurd to mention.”

“Nothing is too absurd to mention, as I always tell those who say so. In this case I have heard talk—I know. It is the Witch who lived hundreds of years ago who is troubling you.”

She sprang to her feet, her eyes aflame with fear.

“Do not speak of her,” she cried. “We—we never do.”

“Many others do, though,” he returned, unmoved. “No evil results. Why, then, this fear? Trust me a little further, madam.”

“It—it is not that,” she breathed. She was still standing, her head turned as though listening.

“You are listening to your daughter—or for your daughter, are you not?”

“What? How did you know?”

“I am a mental acrobat; I told you so, did I not?” he smiled. “Your daughter does not call, I think; and if she does call, what of it? You are not com-

pelled to obey, and she cannot harm you if you do not. Tell me, now, something of this calling."

"She has a strange power."

"That I know."

"I do not know exactly what it is."

"Nor do I—yet. But be seated, madam."

She obeyed him; and continued.

"When I am doing something—anything that she would not approve, I can sometimes feel her—as though she were at my elbow. How ridiculous it sounds!"

"How ridiculous truth often does sound. Continue, madam."

"Oh, Dr. Schmidt," she said, earnestly, "do you really believe what you said a few moments ago about the stage? Do you really think we are just composites? just bits of our ancestors?"

"I think so. I think we are made up of conflicting, shifting molecules. Some shake together, as it were, and form a whole which we call character. Character changes; other molecules have entered in. Partly these molecules—the arrangement of them is under our will; partly, not. When we know more they will be. At present they are not."

"My theory is so different," she said, wistfully. "It does not seem possible that we can be trusted with the power to create—we parents—with power to summon human souls out of the darkness and the peace, and endow them with the awful birthright of life. Does it not seem more probable that souls which have sinned must work out their own redemption, and that they

wait eagerly on the borderland of life for the birth which may prove to them a cleansing fire? Ah, let us hope so. How else could we bear to see a new-born child?"

"Such was my theory half an hour since, madam," said Dr. Schmidt. "I have a new theory every half hour. Yours is the one I hold most often. Still, the molecule one has much to recommend it, I believe. Consider. Do we not change and change and change? From murderers and devils to saints and martyrs? Why, I had a well-known clergyman here in this study a while ago. I told him a dastardly thing and he changed to a murderer before my eyes. Was that not strange? The molecules had shifted, you see. When he gets up to preach next Sunday, they will have shifted again—doubtless."

She seemed hardly to listen.

"So you think, then," she said in a low voice, "that nothing is absurd, that everything is possible? It is a strange belief."

"Madam," said Schmidt, "you have come here to consult me. Is it not so? The sooner we consult, the sooner we shall arrive at a conclusion. Shall we begin? In what does your daughter differ from others?"

Mrs. Carne hesitated.

"Everybody does what she tells him," she ventured, at length.

"Everybody does what some one else tells him except a few people who make others do what they please. You have not described a peculiarity, madam. Continue."

Again Mrs. Carne hesitated. "It is almost impossible to put into words," she said.

"So? We will try another plan, then. I shall ask questions and you will answer them—as best you can. You say that your daughter has peculiarities—characteristics which cause her to stand apart from her fellows. Was she born with these peculiarities? Or have they developed?"

"I do not know."

"Try to think. What happened first to make you think that your child was not as other children. When she was first born—by the way, madam, she was your first child?"

"My first and only child."

"That, too, would account," murmured the doctor, with interest. "The first child! Yet it is not proven. Also, I do not relinquish—continue, madam."

With men, as with the lower animals, half of conversation is carried on without the medium of words. Women must voice all their thoughts in order to be understood; a man utters a half-smothered ejaculation—adds three disconnected words; and ceases, secure in the conviction that the other man has understood him. It is because men see so much of men that we often hear an exasperated wife or daughter demanding explanation of what seems to her a senseless remark. A man would have understood what was omitted; would have filled in the gaps; a woman cannot. Yet some presume to say that women are the equals of men in intelligence! Mrs. Carne, at the

doctor's last speech, gasped, and turned uncomprehending eyes in his direction.

"You do not understand me?" he said, patiently. "Yet it is simple. The first child is generally believed to receive the most marked characteristics, good and bad, of parents and ancestors. It would therefore be probable that your daughter would display certain traits—by the way, what sort of man was your husband?"

Mrs. Carne's faded eyes filled; her thin fingers worked convulsively.

Pitiful always are the futile tears of poor, helpless, sorrowing humanity; but doubly pitiful when a thin, haggard face is distorted into grotesque semblance by them. Dr. Schmidt turned his face away, and for a moment they sat silent in the dusk; the man and the woman who were nothing to each other with the memories that were much to both. The ghosts of dead things were on the wing now, wailing, urging, pressing their ancient claims to grief and longing on the throbbing human hearts that had loved them. At last, Dr. Schmidt spoke.

"You need not answer my question."

"Ah," said the woman, brokenly, "there never was anyone like him."

"There never is anyone like our dead," said Dr. Schmidt, very gently. "We will pass to other things."

"No," she cried. "It is foolish of me. Why should I not speak of him? You want all the information I can give and there is so little. What did you want to know about—my husband?"

"His habits—his pursuits—his trend of thought—anything that you can tell me."

"He was fond of sport, of the open air, of country life. He was generous, openhanded, a favourite with the tenants, not very fond of formal gatherings; yet he liked to gather his friends about him in a simple way."

"You knew him as a child, a boy? Or only as a man?"

"As a man. I was young—not twenty when he first saw me. He was twenty-three. We fell in love with one another at once, and, as soon as I was twenty-one, we were married."

"It was—I need not ask—a happy marriage."

"It was a happy marriage."

"So. You have much for which to be thankful. They are not too common. Now tell me this. When did you first hear about the Witch?"

"When I was first married. There was a portrait covered up in the picture gallery. I asked what it was and my husband seemed embarrassed and annoyed——"

"So!"

"—But, finally told me that it was supposed to be the likeness of the Witch ancestress who lived at Carne in the time of Richard Cœur de Lion. He added that, of course, it was nonsense, as the portrait could only have been painted long after her death; but that tradition said that it was the Witch. Then he told me a little about her—not much."

"Did he tell you why it was covered up?"

"Yes. It was not supposed to be lucky for a bride to see her face. Generations before, on the death of a Carne, the ghost-hound——"

"Ah! The one which howls on the death of a Carne and hunts in the forest?"

"Yes. It was seen by a Carne, staring at the portrait. He died of an apoplectic fit directly afterwards—at least, we know now that it was an apoplectic fit, but they, of course, thought it was the sight of the dog that killed him."

"In a sense they were right, too, of course. No doubt the fright killed him. Continue, madam."

"After his death the Lady of Carne turned the picture to the wall and it has remained so ever since."

"Your husband showed it to you?"

"He did not want to, but I persuaded him. We looked at it together. Then he dropped the veil over its face, turned it to the wall and said, 'Never speak of it again to me, my dear; it is a silly tale and I do not like to discuss it.'"

"Aha! He did not like to discuss it. Then it was more than a silly tale to him. All this is most illuminating, madam. Proceed. Did your husband tell you the whole story of the Witch?"

"No, indeed. Very little, and that reluctantly. I did not press him for details as I was so anxious to see the portrait."

"And the portrait?"

She turned pale and twisted nervously.

"Ah! It resembled some one you know."

"No one I had seen then," she answered in a low

voice. "But—yes, the likeness to Theodora was extraordinary."

"Most interesting. And what impression did this tale make on you, madam?"

"A rather horrible one. I had never seen my husband anything but cheerful and loquacious. When he stammered and shuffled and tried to get me to leave the portrait without looking and told me the little that he did tell so reluctantly, I received an impression of horror which has never left me. Indeed, this is the first time I have spoken of the Witch without feeling the horror."

"So. Did he tell you of the legend of her return to earth as a *Carne*?"

"Oh, no. But I must tell you what followed. I got the old nurse, Nancy, who knew all the family legends, to tell me about the Witch, as I saw my husband would not say more, and my curiosity was excited. She told me all; all the legends of the Witch, the prophecy of her return—all; and I was deeply interested in the latter. When my husband came to lunch, I ran up to him, crying, 'Geoffrey! You did not tell me that the Witch was to come back to earth?'"

"What did he say?"

"I was amazed and shocked at the way in which he received this remark of mine. He turned white, glared at me for a moment without replying, then shouted in a dreadful voice, 'Who has dared to tell you this?' I was ill and unstrung at the time, and I fainted at the shock of seeing him so unlike himself. When I came to, he was chafing my hands, and beside himself with

grief and worry. It seems he had intended, on account of my condition, to keep all alarming tales away from me; and when he found that the one thing that he did not want me to know had been told, his rage got the better of his prudence, and he spoke in the way which I described to you. Naturally, that upset me far more than the talk had done. Hitherto, I had not attached much importance to it; but now——”

“You thought much of it?”

“I tried to put it out of my mind. My husband asked me never to refer to it again, and I never did—to him—never till the day of his death. Then—but I will not speak of that, now.”

“H’m. You have told me much that is important. Was there anything about the portrait that impressed you especially?”

“Yes. The eyes were large and black and had a queer, enticing expression. You did not want to look into them, but you had to. They seemed to draw you and yet to repel you. The hair, you know, was like my daughter’s—a sort of golden red with fiery lights and deep shadows; and these great, black, watching eyes underneath made such a contrast—well, you can understand! You have seen Theodora’s. I must tell you that I was so fascinated by my first look at the portrait that I used to steal away by myself and gaze at it by the hour——”

“Ah!”

“I never spoke of it to anyone. The portrait seemed to draw me. It was so mysterious, so melancholy, and withal so wicked. I used to keep thrusting

back from my mind the thought that she was coming back to earth. Is it not strange, Doctor, that the thought which haunted me was the horror of having a daughter like that?"

"This is amazing! Are you serious, madam? Did no thought of—but, no, I see that it did not. Please continue. You have no idea how much all this interests me."

"When the nurse first placed the infant in my arms she pointed out to me that its head was covered with a bright golden down. I looked at it with a sort of vague horror for which I could not account. It reminded me of something. Then the tiny, scarcely living thing opened its eyes and looked. I screamed and scarcely refrained from dropping it. The eyes were the eyes of the Witch."

"Naturally."

"Naturally, Doctor? I do not understand you."

"I will explain, later. The eyes were the eyes of the witch, you say; the hair, too—— Did you speak of this to your husband?"

"No. I did not want to trouble my husband. But I think he saw a likeness, though, of course, as an infant, it was not nearly so marked. He sometimes talked to me in a very gay, haphazard fashion about the child's hair and complexion. We were both dark-skinned, and I had a bright colour; while her skin was creamy-white and her hair bright golden. He told me once in a very off-hand manner that his hair had been golden, too, as a child."

"Did this reassure you?"

"Doctor Schmidt," said Mrs. Carne, with no intention of being humorous, "it is always foolish for a man to lie to a woman. He does it so badly. I asked Nancy afterwards what colour his hair had been as a child and she said, dark brown. Then I knew what I had already suspected—that he saw the likeness and did not want me to know that he saw. But I could not really believe that it was so——"

"That your child was the Witch, you mean?"

"Yes. I used to think, sometimes, of the Witch's cruelty and weirdness, of how no human thing dared approach her, of how even animals shrank from her, with the one exception of the tiger which she loved and which used to fawn at sight of her. And then I used to scold myself and say that it was folly."

A peculiar sound, resembling a groan and chuckle combined, issued from the doctor's throat.

"Poor, poor child!" he observed, as though to himself.

"She was well cared for, Doctor," Mrs. Carne ventured, timidly.

"I was not thinking of the little Theodora, but of you," he answered, very gently. "So much—so much; and all through mistakes and ignorance. Ah, well, you know what your Shakespeare says, 'There's a divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we will.'"

"Yes. You have heard the parody, perhaps, 'There's a divinity that shapes our ends rough, hew them how we will.' " It seems to have more truth—oh, God for-

give me, I am a wicked woman. If the Lord afflicts me, who am I that I should not submit?"

"We are very apt to christen our follies and ignorances by the name of the Lord and then blame ourselves for not submitting to them. It is not just. We must know something of life before we attempt to live, otherwise we are likely to come to grief. Still, I am sorry. It is pitiful. The worst, too, is that it is not so simple as I at first thought. A pre-natal influence, so strong, so hypnotic—did you keep this horror of the Witch, this fear of the Witch, all the time that you were nursing the child?"

"I do not think it ever left me."

"So! Yet young criminals nurtured in crime, taught to steal as soon as they can walk, are redeemed—why not this child? It is not impossible! I must know more. You can give me another half hour?"

"Oh, yes."

CHAPTER XIV

SOME HEART DID BREAK

"Never morning wore to evening but some heart did break."—TENNYSON.

YOU have told me now," said Dr. Schmidt, "the circumstances of the child's birth, your husband's feeling about the legend, and your own. I now want to know of the child's development. As an infant you observed the likeness to the Witch and thought much of it. Your husband, too, evidently saw the likeness and did not wish you to see it, or to know that he saw it. Now for the rest. What sort of infant was your daughter?"

"Absolutely healthy and tranquil. Apparently she suffered little from ordinary childish ills. When she was teething she sometimes screamed, a sharp little scream——"

"Did you ever see her weep?"

Mrs. Carne looked at him in surprise.

"I suppose so. I do not remember."

"Try to remember. Did you ever see her shed tears?"

"I cannot be sure. She was not a child who fretted or was peevish but—oh, yes, I think she cried, some-

times. The strange thing was, though, that on her father's death——"

"A moment! That was when she was——"

"Between five and six——"

"Ah! You were saying——?"

"That on her father's death she did not shed a tear."

"All this is most enlightening. Now tell me about her babyhood."

"She was a beautiful child—I need not say that. The servants were afraid of her, though—I remember noticing it. I remember, too, overhearing them agree among themselves that she was not quite canny."

"Not quite canny! Odd how that expression seems to cling to your daughter. I have heard so many make use of it, this winter. Well, without doubt there is some reason for all this vague surmise. And your daughter, you say, was beautiful as a child. Was she much admired? I suppose so."

"Everyone noticed her and talked about her. But I do not think that she was what one would call a 'taking' child. She never laughed or played. She did not even smile till she was much older. She would lie for hours, staring, staring——"

"All children stare."

"Not like this. Her eyes looked like ink, as though you could not see into them or through them. They were like nothing else but—the portrait's eyes."

"At what age did you begin to definitely notice her unlikeness to others?"

"Oh, at once, I think. She never laughed and

played like other children, and she did not talk for so long that we thought she was going to be dumb. At three she scarcely spoke. That was one reason why we so long postponed teaching her to say prayers. She was four before my husband, one day, suggested that it was high time that we began." Mrs. Carne shivered. "Never shall I forget that ghastly day! I told her to kneel down and showed her how, she staring at me, meanwhile, with those black, wondering eyes. I folded her little hands, then said, 'Now, baby, say after me "God bless dear Mother and Father"'—I had scarcely uttered the word 'God' than, with a frightful scream, she clawed at my skirts like a wild thing, her eyes black with terror. I tried to soothe her, tried to find out what frightened her, but she could not answer, only continued to give those dreadful screams. My husband strode roughly forward: 'The child is frightened to death,' he cried, 'what can it mean?' At the sound of his voice she gave a yet more ghastly scream and sank back, senseless, foam gathering at her mouth, her eyes glazed and meaningless like a corpse's. He lifted her up and laid her on the bed, then rushed for a doctor. Fortunately one was near at hand. On arriving, he worked with her for a long time, and looked very grave. Finally Theodora regained consciousness and went to sleep at his bidding. On hearing the circumstances of the fit the doctor advised that both my husband and I should keep away as in some way we were connected with her fright, and, therefore, might recall it to her. He sent a trained nurse, who slept in the room with her

that night, and remained with her for several days. Theodora awoke, weak but very quiet, and showed no particular ill effects; in a few days the nurse, after watching her carefully, decided that she was quite well, and left."

"What did the doctor say to your account of the illness?"

"He said that children often took fright at the most trivial things in the most unaccountable way, and that our solemn faces and the unfamiliar posture and words might have affected her imagination. He advised us not to 'monkey with prayers,' as he expressed it, till she was old enough to understand what we were saying."

"You took his advice?"

"My husband explained to me, very elaborately, how sensible and probable the doctor's explanation was. I assented without looking at him. We both knew what the other was thinking. He never suggested her being taught to pray again."

"When did this phenomenon next occur—the fainting at the sound of this word?"

"More than ten months afterwards. We had, at the doctor's orders, taken care that she did not hear anything like a prayer or even the two words which seemed to have affected her so horribly. He said that the impression would wear away with time, but that she was evidently highly nervous, and must be carefully guarded. One day, however, she was walking in the garden, watching the gardener tying up roses. I, looking out of a window, saw that she had slipped

away from her nurse, and so ran down to make sure that she came to no harm. I saw the gardener scratch his head and heard him mutter, 'God, this is a bad one!' or something of that sort. This time she did not scream, just dropped without a word as if she had been shot. The gardener and I rushed forward, simultaneously; I carried her into the house and sent for the doctor. He found her in the former dangerous condition of weakness and unconsciousness. Her heart seemed to have stopped. He sent for me and for my husband after he had attended to her, and had a long talk with us. The substance of it was that some one had been frightening the child, who was evidently highly strung to an abnormal extent. We must find out who the 'some one' was, dismiss her, and watch carefully to see that the child was subjected to no alarming influences. I must trust her to no nurse, but must personally devote myself to seeing that his orders were carried out. 'And if she hears this word again, Doctor, in spite of our precautions?' asked my husband, grimly. 'I will not answer for the consequences,' the doctor replied. Then, evidently getting angry with what he thought my husband's callousness, he added, roughly, 'In plain words, it is most unlikely that your child will recover a third shock of that kind.'"

"How did your husband receive this?"

"In absolute silence. I think his heart broke. He was never the same after that day. I did not speak to him of what I knew was in his mind, for it was

useless. The thing put into words sounded too ridiculous——”

“That is just the reason why you should have put it into words.”

“I did not think so. And, Doctor, what were we to think? Was ever such a strange case? In Geoffrey’s last illness I believe that it was the thought of Theodora that killed him.

“The night before his death he did a terrible thing. He had been very ill—delirious—and was better, but dangerously weak. Towards midnight he suddenly told me to leave him, that he wanted to be alone. Accustomed to the whims of a sick man, I complied without demur, but called the nurse who was attending him. Together we watched his room. Presently we heard him steal into the next room where the child was sleeping—she was then about six—and heard him speaking to her in a low voice. We thought it better not to interfere as he might get violent, which would be worse for both him and the child than giving in to his fancy; so we waited and listened. Presently he opened the door; we started back in the shadows; and he emerged, holding Theodora in his arms. She was wide awake and smiling happily; she was very fond of her father and evidently thought it a treat to be wakened from sleep to take a walk with him. We followed him silently downstairs; he went toward the picture gallery and we followed, a faint and horrible premonition beginning to fill my mind. The fear was well founded; on opening the door, he made straight toward the forbidden portrait, the child still in his

arms. But now a ghastly thing happened; Theodora gave a sudden, sharp scream and wriggled out of her father's arms to the floor, where she stood, staring in the direction of the portrait, terror writ large—yes, and guilt! on every feature of her face. Her father stood, too, staring intently at her; I could not have moved had my life depended on it; the nurse, however, was perfectly self-possessed, and thought it time to interfere.

“‘What are you doing with that child on the cold floor?’ she enquired, good-naturedly, but sharply. ‘Go back to bed at once, Mr. Carne; I don’t know what you can be thinking of.’ Her words seemed to break a spell; Theodora, with a cry, rushed toward me; Geoffrey passed his hand across his forehead, and allowed himself to be led meekly away. As he passed me, he murmured quite distinctly, ‘You see, Laura, she knows!’ He said no more, but obediently climbed the stairs and returned to his room. That night he died—they thought from the exertion and the excitement; I knew, from a broken heart.”

“A sad story! And the child? How did she take her father’s death? You say she was fond of him?”

“Fonder of him than she ever was of me. Yet she never shed a tear. The doctor strongly advised her being taken out of the house and allowed to know nothing of the death, except that her father had gone away. However, I could think of no place where it was possible to make sure of her not receiving fresh shocks; I, therefore, deputed the trained nurse, a most trustworthy person who knew all the circumstances,

to drive about with her, all day. At night they were lodged in a distant wing of the house, far away from the death chamber. But, early in the morning, I awoke, my flesh creeping as it had never crept at the thought of my dead husband in the next room—and suddenly I knew that Theodora was there, that she did not want me to move, that she wished to be alone with her father. And, odder still, I felt that I could not move. I felt like one in the grip of a nightmare. Presently, putting forth all my strength, I sprang out of bed, crept noiselessly to the door, and opened it. The moonlight was streaming in, and lay on my husband's face—I have never been able to bear moonlight, since. Theodora stood by the side of the bed. Evidently she had heard me coming—or knew that I was coming—for she was looking toward the door, her eyes turned full on me. The horror of the bed and of the moonlight was as nothing to the horror of her face. Frozen desolation—that is all that describes it. I held out my arms and she slowly came toward me. I carried her into the next room, took her to bed with me and, in spite of all my efforts, burst into a storm of weeping. She lay in my arms, quiescent, motionless, still with that look of unchildlike despair stamped on her face. Suddenly I knew; I knew what she was feeling; she believed that she had killed her father. I kissed her and rocked her to and fro, and said, as best I could, for weeping, 'Theodora, can you not cry like Mother?' She answered only, 'No.' It was then that I felt the full cruelty of her affliction. I longed to pray for her and with her, but prayer was

denied to her and even the mention of the Almighty."

"A pitiful story! Did she suffer any bad effects from her grief?"

"She changed perceptibly from that day on. She had never been exactly a demonstrative child, but she had been loving, especially with her father. After his death she seemed to care little for anybody. She liked to be alone and was apt to wander when not restrained. On account of her abnormal sensitiveness we did not like to reprove her; but, on the whole, she was an obedient child, willing to fall in with the wishes of others and seldom demurring at any order. She was little interested in other children; and, because of her malady, I made no attempt to oblige her to mingle with them, and, of course, did not send her to school. She had a succession of governesses, and was a docile pupil. Unfortunately, stories spread. You know how superstitious country people are—you laugh, Doctor! But you must remember that I had grounds for superstition where she was concerned, while they had none."

"What other abnormalities did she display?"

"When she was eight, we took her to a circus. She went almost crazy with delight, dancing like a wild thing about the cages where the wild beasts were confined. It was eerie to see that, when she approached, they all looked at her and many made as though they wished to follow her. She had no fear and was interested in all; but she especially loved the tigers, and purred to them in a low, crooning way as though conversing with them; while they purred back, and lashed

their tails, and pushed to the very edge of the bars as though trying to reach her. There was not a hint of ferocity or malice in their demeanour, just the pleasure of a dog to whom one makes overtures. For the first time that I can remember, Theodora made a request. 'Oh, mammy!' she said, 'I should so love to have one of those big, big cats for my very own. It could sleep with me and I would take it for walks. Do, do let me have one?' It hurt me to have to refuse her, ridiculous though the wish was, for her very heart seemed set on it. The circus manager was delighted. 'Oh,' he said, 'if only she were not the child of big folks! She'd make her fortune as a tamer. Why, the wild things love her, now!' Soon her antics with the tigers attracted a crowd, and I was obliged to take her away. She talked of nothing but the tigers till her bed-time, and I thought she would never go to sleep. Very early in the morning a nurse rushed in to tell me that the child's bed was empty. I ordered the horses, drove at once to the circus, and on arriving, found Theodora, as I had expected. The manager was half mad with anxiety. In some way she had got into one of the cages and she and the tiger she had most fancied on the previous day were nestling against one another, his wicked striped head muzzling and rubbing against her thin little shoulder, his yellow eyes gleaming mildly. Outside the cage stood men with revolvers. They did not dare to shoot for fear of hurting the child, or merely wounding the tiger and so making him ferocious. I suppose that it was a terrible sight to others, but I, personally, felt no anx-

iety, for I was sure that Theodora was safe. When she saw me, she cried out indignantly, 'Mammy, these wicked men want to hurt my poor old tiger; you won't let them, will you?'

"This was my opportunity. I explained to her that, unless she left the tiger of her own free will, they would shoot it; but that no harm would come to it if she opened the cage herself and walked out. She looked deeply disappointed. 'Poor, poor old tiger,' she murmured, 'snuggling' against it, and squeezing the ferocious-looking head, 'he loves Theodora.' Then she looked into his eyes and began the melodious purring and murmuring that I had noticed on the previous day. The tiger seemed to understand; he threw his head back with a howl, marched to the further end of the cage, and lay down. Hastily the manager opened the door; Theodora ran back, kissed the tiger once more, then walked slowly and reluctantly through the cage door. A great cheer rang out as she stepped to the ground, and a surging, crowding mob surrounded her. Early as it was, the whole village was on hand; news travels quickly in a small place. Well, I took her home at once, of course; but, from that time on, the tales about her gained force. Already there were rumours of her being unable to pray or to attend church; already her unusual and striking beauty had been pointed out as the beauty of the Witch; when to these was added the account of her dominion over the tiger and the other beasts you can see how quickly gossip grew. The villagers began to shrink from her, to propitiate her, to address her in

fawning tones when compelled to, to hide and make the sign of the Cross at other times. All this was having a bad effect on the child. I, therefore, kept her away from Carne as much as possible; and when she was thirteen I determined to take her abroad, to consult foreign doctors, to leave no stone unturned to help her. Unfortunately, I took her to a famous Italian when she was fourteen and a half, and he very cruelly tried her with the Name in order to make sure that I was speaking the truth. Her collapse, this time, was severe; I, beside myself with anxiety, threatened to have him tried for manslaughter if she should not recover. He replied that the girl was evidently insane, that she should be confined before she became dangerous, that he almost felt it his duty to attend to the matter personally. I fled from Italy and never again attempted to see a doctor. Theodora, too, now had a horror of medical men which put fresh difficulties in the way of her cure."

"You have told me much, madam. A few points I am not yet clear upon. You have not said anything of her lovers and her fascinations——"

"I am coming to that. When she was fourteen, when she first went to Italy, men began to follow her about, to single her out, to make positively insane efforts to see and know her. She became more human with the development of her charm, showing much pleasure in the attentions of men, and gradually developing into something more nearly resembling an ordinary young girl. I, therefore, encouraged her in her little flirtations, delighting in her improved con-

dition, and earnestly hoping that she might outgrow the curious affliction which threatened to ruin her life. Besides—you may think me a fool!—but do you remember the prophecy of the Witch's return to earth? And the prophecy of the love that might redeem her soul?"

"I do."

"I began to wonder whether, perhaps, there might not be truth in the old legend, whether the love of a good man might not be Theodora's salvation. I allowed her a license unknown to young girls of her position, encouraged her in all her friendships with men—and awaited results. They came, alas! too soon. At sixteen she became somewhat infatuated with a young Frenchman who was, apparently, much in love with her. They were secretly engaged. I—I do not know what happened"—her voice faltered—"but he left her and rushed away from Paris. That night he perished in a railway fatality."

"H'm! This does not seem relevant. I cannot see why you should——"

"Doctor Schmidt! Theodora is nearly twenty and has been engaged times without number. Every one of her lovers has deserted her, and every one has suffered misfortune afterwards. In two cases of which I know—it has been death."

"Ah, Mrs. Carne, now you are showing superstition."

"I am relating facts. You have heard of Mr. Herrod, no doubt? He had an accident soon after he left her. Now it is Mr. Aubrey and I am in terror——"

"Can you not prevent your daughter becoming engaged to these men? It does not look well to say the least, that——"

"Can I forbid her to save her soul? And do you suppose she would listen to me if I did? No; I have brought into being one who, whether Witch or woman, is ineffably stronger than I. She will do as she wishes. But one thing puzzles me." She lowered her voice, involuntarily, and shivered.

"What is that?"

"What does she tell them?"

"Them?"

"Her suitors! What does she tell them that changes their loudly-expressed admiration to horror, that causes them to leave her as though she were contaminated? Can you guess?"

"I can guess; but my guess may not be worth much. Have you not a theory?"

"I have sometimes wondered whether—whether she knows something about herself that she keeps hidden even from me; something that she feels she must tell before marriage."

"Ah! And you think that what she tells them is so serious that not one wishes to marry her on hearing it?"

"What do you think?"

"I think probability points that way. It has not occurred to you that she may wish to test their love? To make sure that it is worth having?"

"I had not thought of that!"

"Do you not think it possible, at least, that, if her

salvation depends on the kind of man she selects, she may wish to test his love and try it thoroughly?"

"Doctor, you know what men in love are like. You know what they can forgive, what they can gloss over. What test can she put them to so severe that not one can stand it?"

"I do not know."

"And how can you account for the misfortunes which follow all who offend her?"

"I cannot account."

They were silent for a few moments; then Mrs. Carne spoke.

"Dr. Schmidt, I have trusted you with much. When I first heard of you from Lord Haviland—heard of your researches and of your knowledge—I, for the first time in years, had a gleam of hope. That has almost left me, now. Can you—hearing what I tell you—can you offer me any crumb of comfort?"

"I am not so hopeful as I was before I heard the story of your married life."

Mrs. Carne's pale grey eyes opened in amazement.

"Why, what can you mean?"

"I—no, madam, I do not think I will explain."

He looked at her pityingly; at the sad, worn face, the timid eyes, the slight, bowed form.

"It would be useless to tell you just what I think," he reiterated, very gently. "It would be useless, cru—that is to say, you would not understand what I meant without understanding much of which you are, evidently, ignorant. But, before telling you that I relinquish all hope, I should wish to know a few things

more. In the first place, how long do Miss Theodora's engagements usually last?"

She looked at him in surprise. "A few months; sometimes less."

"You do not, then, anticipate that the engagement with Mr. Aubrey will be broken for some little time?"

"I should not think that it would; not for some weeks, at least."

"Then there would be nothing to prevent my running down to New York and consulting two or three men who are staying there now, and who have experience in such matters? In a case of such magnitude, I should not dare to act hastily."

Her face lit up. "You think there is hope, then?"

"I think there is some hope," he answered, honestly. "There may be more than I, at present, think. I shall want other opinions on the case. There is one factor, though, that might alter my point of view, and I, therefore, want you to answer the questions which I am about to put, very carefully."

"Oh, I shall."

"Where is old Nancy, who told you of the Witch?"

"Dead. Dead years ago."

"How old was Theodora when she died?"

"About five."

"Had she much to do with the child?"

"Very little. She always seemed afraid of her."

"So! Now tell me this; your child was baptized, of course?"

"Of course."

"Into the Church of England? By the rites of the English Church?"

"Why, yes," she answered, looking puzzled.

"You do not see the connection?" he asked, smiling. "Perhaps you will, a little later on. Now, one thing more. Do not be surprised or hurt, for the question is a necessary one. Your husband—was he a man of violent temper?"

"Oh, no. Oh, no."

"Now think, carefully. Remember, he would wish you to answer truly. A man who showed such unwise rage on hearing that Nancy had told you the legend of the Witch, cannot have been mild of disposition. Is it not so?"

She struggled for words. "He was nearly always gentle and courteous," she answered, unwillingly, "but he spoke hastily at times."

"He swore, perhaps!"

"Y-y-yes; very occasionally; so occasionally that I can remember the different times."

"Please recall them."

"Once, I remember, when Theodora was a baby, he came up to me very angrily, and swore about some poacher; I remember that very distinctly because the child was sitting in my lap, and, when she saw her father, she smiled and held out her arms to him; and he looked so ashamed and took her from me and began to play with her, and said no more about the poacher."

"The child was sitting on your lap. What was her age?"

"About three—a little more, perhaps."

"Three! Three! Not speaking, you say, at that age?"

"Just beginning to speak."

"Yet not a stupid child? Observant, able to show her desires and dislikes—displaying preferences and aversions?"

"Oh, yes—quite strongly."

"Do you remember the oath that her father used?"

"Oh, why do you ask me, Doctor? The usual thing that angry men say."

"The unmentionable place, I suppose?" hazarded Dr. Schmidt, smiling. "The Creator? And all that?"

"Exactly."

"Will you repeat the exact words as you remember them?"

She repeated them unwillingly.

"You are sure of the words?"

"Oh, quite sure."

"And you are sure of the child's age?"

"Oh, yes."

"How do you remember that she was over three?"

"She was wearing a necklace that her father had given her on her third birthday—a foreign thing that he admired greatly. The figure three was woven into the design. I often dressed her in it, knowing that her father liked to see it; and she was wearing it on this particular day."

"You are sure of that?"

"Quite sure. But why—why do you attach so much importance——?"

"Because," cried the other, springing to his feet in much excitement, "because, if this is true—cannot you see where it leads us? The words you repeated to me? The words that Theodora cannot hear! Why could she hear them at three and not at four? Do you not see?"

Mrs. Carne stared at him mutely.

"Why could she hear them as an infant in the church, and not as a child? If," cried Dr. Schmidt, "if you are not mistaken on this one point, madam, all—all is explained. Let me see! It is now six-thirty. I can get the New York train at seven-twenty. I must go and pack my valise. Good-bye, madam; good-bye."

"Oh—you have hope?"

"Great hope. But stay! There is another point which I must elucidate. As I remember the legend, there were *two* words, were there not, which the Witch could not endure to hear?"

"Why—yes. Yes, of course!"

"Does Theodora show any distress at the sound of the word 'death'?"

She pondered a few moments, her face changing rapidly.

"No," she said at last, "none whatever. But how extraordinary! *Both* words were fatal to the Witch, were they not? It was when she heard both words that she disappeared. I can't understand it."

The German's eye gleamed.

"A case of such interest has never before come my way," he said slowly. "Amazing! I think that, at last, I see daylight. But do not be too much elated; a cure

may be difficult to find ; it may take months, years. Yet the disease, I think, is correctly diagnosed. I need not tell you, madam, that no one, with the single exception of our good friend, Father Munn, must know anything of all this."

"Oh, no."

"So! You may go now. I must catch that train. Excuse my discourtesy, madam."

CHAPTER XV

BRAWLING JUDGMENTS

"Where cheerful ignorance
Delivers brawling judgments all day long
On all things unashamed."

—KIPLING.

BUT then there was the dog!" said Mrs. Bilkins. "No, don't interrupt me, Abernethy, for it's no use; *I will* speak. I know that my teeth are no longer white and regular, but I can see no reason why I should not be allowed to make a remark once in a while even if I am a——"

"Muffin, Aunt Joanna?" inquired Lynn hastily, trying not to look at her husband or at Dr. Hale.

For some time past Mrs. Amherst had been vainly trying to persuade Dr. Hale to fulfil a promise to call on the "clinging vine." At last a dark day had forced a holiday on her husband, and he and she had joined forces and inveigled Dr. Hale into the Bilkins' home.

"If you approve of clinging vines you cannot possibly object to calling on them once in a lifetime," they had pointed out.

"Delighted. I shall be delighted," the doctor had hastily assured them.

Gerald Amherst, who possessed a boyish love of

jokes, was enthralled by the company in which he found himself. Agatha Lighton had chosen this dark day to make a call on Mrs. Bilkins and they found her sitting by the side of the latter looking like a Paris-clad angel. The pleasure which Amherst showed on greeting her was so evident that Agatha made a mental note of the fact that she could easily have had him, too, if she had chosen to cut Lynn out in the past.

"No, no muffin," said Mrs. Bilkins. "As I was saying, Lynn, when I was interrupted," she glared from force of habit at Mr. Bilkins, who cowered, "as I was saying, there is no way of accounting for That Dog. It rose up out of nowhere, stood on a hill, pointed one paw at Mr. Herrod and——"

"Oh, *no*, Aunt Joanna!" cried Lynn, unable to restrain a smothered gasp.

"Really, Joanna," broke in Mr. Bilkins mildly, "that was not the way Mr. Merton told the story."

"Ah! then I am to infer that I am a liar?" inquired Mrs. Bilkins dramatically. Gerald promptly turned his back, and stared fixedly out of the window.

"Oh, no, my dear," said Mr. Bilkins, much shocked. "Far from that! I merely meant to say that Mr. Merton said that—that—I don't remember exactly what it was that he did say, but he certainly did not say that—that the dog had a paw—I mean, waved a paw—in short——"

"Well!" exclaimed Mrs. Bilkins triumphantly, "if you were to laugh at your Uncle Abernethy, Lynn, I shouldn't blame you! (What on earth is the matter

with Gerald? has he a cold?) Such nonsense, Abernethy! Now try to keep quiet and *I* shall tell the story."

Mr. Bilkins collapsed like a flattened balloon, and Mrs. Bilkins took up the parable.

"The dog stood on the hill, pointing with its right paw——"

"Which right paw?" inquired Gerald with interest. "A dog has two right paws, you know."

"I don't believe this dog had two right paws," rejoined Mrs. Bilkins, regarding him with severe suspicion.

"Oh—oh, probably not," agreed Gerald with suspicious alacrity. "Go on, Aunt Joanna. The dog stood on his one and only left paw—for if he had but one right paw it stands to reason he must have had only one left paw—pointed his right paw at Herrod——"

"And Herrod dropped to the ground like a dead man!" finished Mrs. Bilkins in tones of hollow enjoyment. "And then you tell me I ought to ask that girl to dinner!"

"Girl!" exclaimed Dr. Hale. "What girl?"

"Why, That Girl," said Mrs. Bilkins, looking at him with surprise. "That Theodora Carne. The wicked creature who was the cause of it all."

"The cause of a dog climbing a hill and——?"

"—standing on his left paw and waving his right paw at Herrod," put in Gerald solemnly. "Thus causing Herrod to drop dead on the ground—no, not dead exactly—what was it, Lynn?"

"He broke his collar bone," Lynn muttered indistinctly—then suddenly broke down and joined in the roar which the others set up. "I'm sorry, Aunt Joanna, I am really; but Gerald is so absurd."

"He certainly is absurd," said Mrs. Bilkins icily. "It is a new experience for me to be laughed at in my own house. And Dr. Schmidt, whom you all think so much of, said that it was nonsense to laugh at that dog because a much worse thing than a dog might have——"

"Got up on a snowbank and waved its right paw?"

"Nonsense, Gerald!" interrupted Lynn hastily. "Don't pay any attention to him, Aunt Joanna. But I do think you have misunderstood Dr. Schmidt. What he said was that the workings of the subconscious mind are so peculiar that if Miss Carne had conceived some horrible image in her brain she could have impressed the image on Mr. Herrod's brain from a distance if she had had the skill. But he said that he was simply throwing that out as a theory because such things have been known; he did not say for a moment that it was not a real dog which those men saw."

"Well, he allowed, anyway, that she had a familiar spirit," put in Mrs. Bilkins triumphantly.

"Oh, no. What he said was that the tales of familiar spirits might have grown up in that way—that the subconscious mind might receive terrifying impressions of things which did not exist, and be unable to distinguish them from things in the world of matter."

"Yes, he used some long words like those," said Mrs. Bilkins comfortably; "but it was quite easy for any intelligent person to see what he was driving at. And, whether the girl has a familiar spirit or a subconscious mind or whatever it is that she has, I cannot feel that she is a proper person to have round. I never heard of such awful things till lately, and I can hardly credit them, even now."

"And," put in Agatha with a heavenly simper, "as Mrs. Bilkins says, no girl with a subconscious mind can reasonably expect to get a husband."

"Not unless she is smart enough to keep it hidden till they are safely married," put in Mrs. Bilkins incautiously. "Not," she added, with a shocked expression, "that I approve of such measures. It is very wrong to deceive—and besides, unless one does it very well, one is almost certain to be found out."

"A number of people who possess subconscious minds do marry, though," said Gerald, immensely entertained. "Don't they, Hale?"

"Yes, indeed," said the other man gravely. "There is no mention in the marriage service of the subconscious mind constituting a bar to matrimony. Indeed," he added confidentially, "it is now believed, on good authority, that Adam himself possessed one."

"Then, if so," exclaimed Mrs. Bilkins, "that is the reason that he ate the apple!"

"I thought the reason was that his wife persuaded him," murmured Gerald.

"Persuaded? insisted on it, you mean," said Dr. Hale. "She was a regular militant Suffragette."

"Yes! and see what came of it!" said Mrs. Bilkins triumphantly. "She got him turned out of the Garden of Eden. That's what comes of women attempting to dictate to their husbands. I wish I had been there! 'Adam!' I would have said, 'don't let me catch you touching those apples. And, if a serpent comes along and wants to talk to you, just refer him to me.' But Eve was an unwomanly creature who wanted to think for herself."

"Do you think that unwomanly?" inquired the doctor gravely. "Why—surely that is a pre-Ibsenite view, isn't it, Mrs. Bilkins? No one could read Ibsen and then say that a woman had no right to think for herself."

"Ibsen!" queried Mrs. Bilkins contemptuously. "Who is Ibsen? I mean, what did Ibsen amount to? *I don't approve of him.*"

"Why not?"

"Why—chiefly on account of his dreadful women," said Mrs. Bilkins virtuously. "Always rebelling against their natural spheres, and saying they wouldn't be doll-wives and things of that sort. It's a pity about them!" she ejaculated fiercely, rearing her huge bulk ominously in her easy chair. "A pity about them! (Abernethy, you are surely not eating a third piece of cake; you will make yourself sick.) As if any right-minded woman could possibly object to being the doll-wife of her loving husband and natural protector."

Dr. Hale looked in a stunned sort of fashion at Mrs. Bilkins' "natural protector" gulping down tea that he

did not want and refusing cake that he did want at the behest of his gigantic "doll-wife"; and Lynn wished fervently that Dickens were not dead.

"A man is a man!" went on Mrs. Bilkins combatively.

This being obvious, nobody contradicted her.

"And he was meant by the Almighty to be master in his own house."

Lynn very properly refrained from pointing out that the intentions of the Almighty were sometimes frustrated; and the "doll-wife" continued.

"Man is the sturdy oak. And woman is the clinging vine. And you can't alter human nature. One leans one's weakness on the strength of man—Abernethy, don't forget to remind me to tell the milkman that this cream is not so rich as it should be—what's that? you'll speak to him yourself? nonsense! as if he would pay any attention to anything *you* said! You'd probably pay him twice over rather than have an argument—and one is guided in the great problems of life by his firmer will and clearer judgment—Abernethy! *will* you stop eating bread and butter? You know you never have any appetite for dinner when you eat so much at tea! I declare! one has to watch you as if you were a child! It's not five minutes since I took the cake away from you and now——"

The unhappy Abernethy glared wildly at his "doll-wife," and clutched his bread and butter with a sort of firm despair. If you want to see the most down-trodden man show spirit, attempt to deprive him of his victuals!

"Since I have begun this slice, Joanna," he said in a voice which he vainly tried to render steady, "I think I shall just finish it."

"Oh, certainly!" said Mrs. Bilkins coldly. "Certainly, Abernethy. Of course you can do exactly as you choose. You are not married to a Suffragette or anything of that sort. It is true that, many years ago, when my hair was golden and abundant——"

Mr. Bilkins dropped his bread and butter as though it had bitten him.

"—and my eyes clear and sparkling—no, do not interrupt me, I am just making a little remark!—it is true that, in *those* days, my words were listened to with something approaching respect. But of course I cannot expect that now——"

"On second thoughts, Joanna," muttered Mr. Bilkins abjectly, "on second thoughts, my dear, I will *not*—ah, finish my—ah, bread and butter. What you say is true. It does interfere with my appetite for dinner. You are quite right as—ah, you usually are."

"I *may* have my faults, Abernethy," said the doll-wife in tones which seemed to imply that she felt strong doubt on the point. "I *may* have my faults. But I think any fair-minded person must admit that I usually am right."

There was a general chorus of assent, more or less emphatic.

"And now to return to Miss Carne," said Mrs. Bilkins happily, "isn't it a dreadful thing that——"

Dr. Hale sat upright. His jaw took a certain set.

"Yes, isn't it a dreadful thing," he said pleasantly,

"that such ridiculous tales should have been set in circulation by people who are supposed to be sane. Do, my dear Mrs. Bilkins—for I can't help perceiving that you are a person of influence—do try to contradict and nullify these absurd reports. Otherwise people may be found with intellects so weak as to place some faith in them."

"Oh, but she has a subconscious mind," said Mrs. Bilkins learnedly. "There is no use in trying to contradict that, for people wouldn't believe me if I did. Dr. Schmidt said she had one. And though I do think that these scientific men who study a lot are apt to get their brains in a very queer condition, still I really believe that he is right, in this instance. And so I always tell everyone to fight shy of Miss Carne, for a girl who can be instrumental in breaking people's collar bones may——"

"So sorry, Aunt Joanna," broke in Lynn hastily, "but we really must go. Come, Gerald; come, Dr. Hale!"

Dr. Hale rose with alacrity but Mr. Amherst kept his seat.

"If Ned doesn't mind seeing you home," he said cheerfully, "I think I'll stay a while longer and chat with Auntie. I so seldom see her, alone." He winked elaborately at his wife, who responded with a warning glance but made no answer. She and Dr. Hale left the house together immediately.

"I am always afraid that Gerald will go a little too far," she said, as they reached the pavement. "After all, Aunt Joanna is not a congenital idiot and——"

"No?" inquired the doctor with dangerous politeness. Mrs. Amherst looked at him.

"You were on the verge of being rude to her—in her own house too!" she said reprovingly. "I hurried you away just in time. Why, you know it's not the least bit of use to argue with people of that calibre; I've tried it so often and always with the same result. They merely think you're unpleasant when you don't agree with them. What's that? what are you holding out your hand for?"

"Mrs. Amherst," said the doctor gravely, "shake! I want to shake. I'm a Suffragette—the latest recruit—the very latest addition to your noble army."

"Don't be ridiculous. What on earth is the matter with you?"

"Your Aunt Joanna—that's what's the matter with me. If that's the sort of woman who doesn't want to vote, give me the women who do. I'm a convert—rabid—fervent. Words can't express the sincerity of my conversion. The Suffragettes should kidnap Mrs. Bilkins and carry her round from place to place to lecture on Ibsen; she'd be better than twenty pamphlets. Whew!"

"You—didn't—admire—the clinging vine——"

"Mrs. Amherst, may I request you to control yourself. This mirth is ill-timed. And, oh, by Jove! this is serious, now! will you do me a favour?"

"Twenty."

"One will do. Ask me to your house some time when you expect Miss Carne. I—I'm curious. All this inane talk——"

"Aren't you afraid?"

"Afraid? Of what?"

"Oh, of her fascinations. They say that no man escapes."

"Then there's no dodging my fate, is there?" he asked with a strained laugh. "No; I'm very anxious to meet her and see what she is like. You know I asked if I might call after the mad dog episode; but, directly afterwards, I heard of her engagement and—and—I say! what the devil!—beg pardon! but what on earth's this?"

"This" was a man who darted round the corner, almost knocking Mrs. Amherst down.

"Beg pardon," he muttered thickly. "Beg pardon. Didn't see you—oh, Mrs. Amherst! very sorry! I—was running——"

"So we see," commented the doctor dryly. "What's the matter with you, Aubrey? Wanted by the police? or trying to catch a train?"

Aubrey started. "A train?" he stammered suspiciously. "A train? That's what Herrod did, wasn't it? left the city? But it didn't do any good——"

"What in thunder do you mean?"

"Don't speak to me."

"Is it possible," said Lynn, with sudden enlightenment, "that something has happened—that you and Miss Carne——"

But at the mention of that name Mr. Aubrey fairly squirmed and emitted something like a smothered shriek. "She's a devil!" he said thickly. "A devil! I'll leave to-morrow for Europe—for the Mediterra-

nean. But I don't believe I'll escape. She'll—— Let me pass——!"

"Look here, Aubrey, you're drunk!" cried the doctor angrily. "That's no way to speak of your fiancée."

"Fiancée!" screamed Aubrey, his face suddenly ghastly. "Let me forget—let me forget I've known her—God grant I escape——!" He broke from Dr. Hale's detaining hand and sped like a hunted rat down the street.

Mrs. Amherst and Dr. Hale stood where he had left them, staring after his retreating form. The doctor uttered an exclamation of disgust.

"A miserable specimen!" he exclaimed. "Not alive enough to amount to anything, yet, unfortunately, not quite dead enough to bury. And to think that that magnificent creature—why, Mrs. Amherst, you look quite pale. Did that shrimp worry you?"

"No—yes—in a way! Do you still want to meet Miss Carne, Dr. Hale?"

He turned toward her, a sudden light flashing into his eyes.

Edward Hale had not intended to marry for many years. But he had neglected to count on emotions and instincts some millions of years older than he. From the time he had first seen the mysterious English girl the world had changed, life had changed, he had changed. Everything within him had turned to one desperate longing for Theodora Carne. But his sense of honour—honour, like morality, is geographical, but none the less a thing to be reckoned with—had forbidden him to approach another man's betrothed. Now

Martin Aubrey's unguarded words had unbolted the door of his dungeon.

"Mrs. Amherst," he said in carefully measured tones, "I will tell *you* frankly that I had rather meet Theodora Carne than anyone else on earth. You have always been my friend; bear this in mind and you will make me very happy."

CHAPTER XVI

THE SECRETS OF THE DEAD

"The charge is old?—As old as Cain—as fresh as yesterday;
Old as the Ten Commandments; have ye *talked* those laws
away?

Our friends believe? Of course they do—as sheltered women
may;

But have they seen the shrieking soul ripped from the quiver-
ing clay?

They! If their own front door is shut, they'll swear the
whole world's warm;

What do they know of dread of death or hanging fear of
harm?

—

But you—you know—ay, ten times more; *the secrets of the
dead,*

Black terror on the country-side by word and whisper bred."

—KIPLING.

AUBREY'S eyes were wide open and stared hideously. Almost like living things they gazed into Dr. Hale's. The dead, awful face struck terror into the hearts of the other watchers; but the young doctor did not flinch or pale. He stood as though absorbed in some problem, the solution of which evaded him.

What had caused the death of this man? There was no mark of violence. It was easy, of course, to

fall back on the ancient stand-by, "Heart Failure." Dr. Hale, however, wished to know what had caused the heart to fail.

"We remembered that you knew him," whispered the cowed, weeping landlady. "He spoke last night of having seen you with Mrs. Amherst. So yours was the first name that came to my mind. As soon as I saw him, 'Telephone to Dr. Hale,' said I to Jane."

"Let me see! You heard no sound in the night?"

"None. Mr. Aubrey has the whole of the top flat, and though a friend sometimes stays with him, he was alone last night. Still, it's all open, and if he had made a sound—but I knew something was going to happen, I knew——"

"Why was it that you only just discovered him?"

"Mr. Aubrey often oversleeps and doesn't like to be wakened. So we waited till eleven and then I said to Jane, who was doing up the rooms, 'Knock and see if he's there. The chances are that he's gone out without our noticing.'"

"And then?"

"She knocked and knocked and didn't get any answer; so she opened the door quietly and looked—and the next I heard was a scream, and down she rushed, telling me to go and see. I shook the girl, I was so angry, but I couldn't get an answer out of her, so, as there wasn't a man in the house or anyone but her to take with me, I went up alone, and found—this. But I knew,—I knew before I looked."

"And then you telephoned me."

"Yes. Or, rather, Jane did."

"That is all you can tell me?"

"Every bit. Such a thing to happen! I can't believe it, now. Poor young man! To think that last night he was sitting at dinner with the others——"

"Oh, he was! At what time?"

"Seven, our usual dinner hour."

"H'm! What time did he come in?"

"About six, I should say. He came in hastily and ran upstairs as if he were in a great hurry. Mr. Carroll, one of our young gentlemen, called something out after him, and he did not answer, just laughed. His laugh was wild and his face very white."

"Did he say anything of going abroad?"

"How did you know?" The landlady's face suddenly fired with surprise and mistrust.

"I saw him yesterday about half-past five and he spoke of it. Did he tell you where he was going?"

"No. And he asked me not to say that he was leaving the city. He paid for his rooms in advance for three months ahead, and said he didn't know when he would be back."

"We must notify the police at once. I shall wait till they come."

Mrs. Somers went to the telephone and Dr. Hale sat down, trying to rearrange his thoughts.

"It will be unnecessary to have her name brought into this," he thought. "I had better warn Mrs. Amherst. Much will be suspected—but I think it was nervous shock resulting in coma."

He made sundry observations and jotted them down in his notebook. Aubrey had probably been dead about

eight hours. It was now after eleven. At three, then——

Violence was out of the question. Was it possible, though, that some one had tried to effect an entrance and that, in the man's unhinged condition, the shock had killed him? The eyes looked as though he had died, staring, staring. At what?

When the police arrived Dr. Hale was detained as a witness. Their questions brought nothing to light beyond the already ascertained facts that Mr. Aubrey had appeared excited on the previous evening, had spoken wildly of his broken engagement, had been silent and pale at dinner, and had told the landlady of his immediate departure, requesting silence about it. Carroll, the young man who had last seen him alive, added that he had begged not to be left alone that night; but that he, Carroll, had laughed so uproariously at the request that Aubrey, in a huff, had desired him to leave at once. Mrs. Somers added that he had telephoned two or three friends, asking them to spend the night; but had been unsuccessful in obtaining a companion.

"He was afraid—afraid of something evidently," said one of the detectives. "Had he any cause for fear that either of you know?"

"None," averred both.

"Any enemies?"

"None that were known."

"Any correspondents?"

The second detective, who had been prowling around the room, suddenly pounced on a sheet of

note-paper, torn in half, that lay in the waste-paper basket.

"Let us see what this is!" he exclaimed.

"This" was disappointing. A single sheet of note-paper, with a few apparently irrelevant words written upon it. "So, if I say nothing, if I keep everything hidden, you will not—I vow solemnly, as though it were my dying breath, that——" It ended here. The writer had apparently stopped at this point, torn the letter in half and thrown it away. "Why, I wonder!" mused Dr. Hale. "Probably because he thought better of it," volunteered the detective. "It may have struck him that it was a foolish letter to write—perhaps, indeed, he was writing a short story," he suddenly exclaimed. "It sounds more like a magazine story than a letter that a business man would write."

Mrs. Somers, who had remained silent, broke in at this juncture.

"Mr. Aubrey knew that he was going to his death last night," she said solemnly. "I knew it too."

The three men started and turned on her. "What do you mean by this?" demanded one magisterially. "Remember, anything you say will be used against you, so if you prefer to wait and——"

"I don't prefer to wait," she said hysterically. "What I'm going to say will sound like nonsense—but I'll say it, nevertheless. That red-haired Witch he was engaged to——"

"Mrs. Somers!" said Dr. Hale sternly. "Be careful how you drag her name into this!"

"Miss Carne will never hang for Mr. Aubrey's mur-

der," said Mrs. Somers. "But his death is at her door."

"Ah! The broken engagement!" muttered the first detective, smiling. "But broken engagements don't result in death, as a rule."

"As for that," she said. "It's my belief that if the engagement hadn't been broken Mr. Aubrey would be alive now. But I don't think it was the shock that killed him. I think——"

"Mrs. Somers!"

"I think," she continued, fixing her eyes imperturbably on the doctor, "that if it wasn't a woman that killed Mr. Aubrey—it was something worse!"

"We shall have to ask you what you mean by this," said the detective.

"And I'll tell you," she said doggedly. "I'll tell you, though you'll laugh at me, and think me a superstitious fool. At about three, last night—this morning, I mean——"

"A moment. How did you know the time?"

"Afterwards I got out of bed and looked at my watch and the hand pointed to ten minutes past. As I was saying, then, about three I awoke. There was a sort of grey cloud before my eyes, and I heard something that sounded like a great cat purring. It terrified me. I rubbed my eyes, and tried to clear them; at last the mist moved away, and I saw——"

"Yes?"

"Oh, you'll think me a fool, but what I say is gospel truth. I saw Mr. Aubrey's bedroom and he, Mr. Aubrey, sitting up in bed, looking—looking with eyes

of such terror as I never saw in a human being's head. Opposite him, with one arm leaning on the haut-boy yonder, was the most beautiful woman I ever saw in my life, dressed all in shimmering, clinging lace of some kind, white and foamy. The sleeves were loose and one had fallen back, as she leaned on the bureau, showing her arm, which was white and polished and gleamed like an egg. Her hair was falling all about her like a red cloak, thick and glittering and heavy. But her eyes—oh, but they were wicked! For all her white skin and her red hair, they were black—as black as the pit and as cruel. They looked at Mr. Aubrey—or I might rather say they looked through him—like a knife—and he, without a word, dropped back on the pillow like a dead man. Then the whole thing cleared away like a cloud and there was only the darkness. I couldn't bear it; I jumped up and turned on the light and looked at the time—I don't know what made me. Then I got a book, took it to bed, and dropped off, reading it. But, as I was reading, I believe Mr. Aubrey was lying dead in the room above me." She paused solemnly.

"Why do you connect this vision with Mr. Aubrey's fiancée?" inquired Dr. Hale, interested in spite of himself.

"I had seen her once," said Mrs. Somers unwillingly, "out driving with him. She was dressed all in grey, with a grey fur cap perched on that red head of hers—but I knew her for all that."

"At the time you had this dream did you connect the woman with Miss Carne?"

"No. I didn't connect anything with anything. If you had seen what I saw you'd be glad you hadn't died with fright too. It wasn't a girl I saw, it was a devil. A devil with a devil's powers. She killed him just as a snake kills a rabbit; she hypnotised him with fear till he died of it. But you were asking me why I connected the girl with Miss Carne. When I saw the girl in the sleigh she was smiling and looking like a queen; yet, for all her smiles and her beauty, she made cold chills run down my back——"

"Another!" muttered Dr. Hale, with uncontrollable surprise.

"What do you mean by another? It was she, you couldn't mistake her. Yet she looked so different in her lace gown and with her hair all hanging that it took me a while to put two and two together. But, as I was reading and trying to put the thing out of my mind, suddenly it flashed across my mind who it was, and what she had done. I tried to say, 'Nonsense!' and 'Don't be a fool!' but I tell you that, when I came to the breakfast table, the thing I most wanted to see was Mr. Aubrey's face. And when he didn't come I knew—I knew. I could have told Jane what she told me. When I came up here he was lying just the way I'd seen him fall—poor soul, poor soul!"

One of the detectives shrugged his shoulders uncomfortably.

"We all have bad dreams, sometimes," he suggested gruffly. "I'll have to hold you all as witnesses, and the other lady who saw him too perhaps. Though

I don't know that that'll be necessary, considering that you were with her and heard all he said yesterday; and so many others saw him afterwards. This Miss Carne, now! She'll have to know and we'll have to get her testimony as to why the engagement was broken, if possible—not that I believe it had any bearing on the case. The man was probably subject to heart trouble and he had a shock of some kind which killed him. Quite simple.”

“Quite! But we don't want this woman spreading old wives' tales about apparitions in lace gowns weaving spells. It might make things very unpleasant for the young lady. Don't you think that——”

“Sure. I'll shut her up. Mrs. Somers,” he said, advancing on the landlady, “as your friend, I want to give you a word of warning. You may get into trouble if you say too much about your dreams. You understand me?”

She turned livid. “You mean,” she said thickly, “that I might have her to deal with? Oh, God forbid!”

“No, no, that wasn't what I meant,” said the detective impatiently. “I——”

Dr. Hale looked significantly at him.

“Without attaching too much importance to your story,” he said gravely to Mrs. Somers, “it is still well to be on the safe side. If you think this woman has devilish powers you certainly don't want to antagonise her, do you?”

“Never!” ejaculated Mrs. Somers, clasping her

hands. "Oh, if I had—can I depend on you gentlemen keeping quiet about this? It won't be necessary for me to speak of my—my vision if I'm called as a witness, will it?"

"Certainly not. No one is compelled to tell his dreams in court, and, if he did, he would be laughed at. We'll say nothing, depend upon it."

"Oh, thank you, thank you, gentlemen," she cried. "You'll think me a fool—but if you had seen her eyes! And, if anything were to happen to me——" her voice shook with sobs, "if anything were to happen to me—my boy!—you know! he's—he's never been quite like others. He can't fend for himself; and I'm all he has." She burst into wild sobs, rocking to and fro. As she sobbed a face appeared in the doorway; the face of a young man, with flaccid chin, and unmeaning eyes. He laughed foolishly, and gambolled about her. "Don't cry, mother!" he begged. "I heard what you said. The Witch won't hurt you. If she does I'll kill her!" He doubled his fists fiercely, then let them drop at his side and burst into merriment, vacant laughter.

The tragedy of death is nothing to the tragedy of life. Dr. Hale watched them, with a sick feeling at his heart—the dead with the eyes that stared, the living with the eyes that lolled, the tormented, weeping mother, and the awed and silent men. Finally he touched one of the detectives on the arm.

"Let us leave them," he said hoarsely. "You said that you would have to see Miss Carne. I know

the Carnes. Would it not be well to let me go with you and break the news? I'll wait for you, outside."

"Excellent!" rejoined the chief detective. "I'll just leave directions and see that the room is cleared—and then I'll be with you."

CHAPTER XVII

THE MOTHER

"If I were hanged on the highest hill,
I know whose love would follow me still,
Mother o' mine, O mother o' mine!"

—KIPLING.

THE cold Canadian air seemed nectar after the room of death. The doctor inhaled it greedily, and tried to forget what he had just seen. His thoughts returned instantly to the weeping landlady. He knew a little of her history, which was a pitiful one.

The petted daughter of a rich man, she had become the petted wife of another rich man. At the age of sixty her husband had died, leaving her with a small life insurance and an imbecile child. Compassionate friends had given her a home for a time, and had then bestirred themselves in her behalf. As she knew nothing that could support her beyond a not too able housekeeping, they had, after much discussion, helped her to fit up a large house in a fashionable district, and to fill the house with young men. Only privileged people could obtain an entrée; the rooms were well kept, the table that of a good private house, the atmosphere refined and exclusive. Her

many friends reaped the reward of their kindness and energy in seeing the poor woman's old age partly provided for.

Still, however, remained the horror of the imbecile son. He was in no way dangerous, yet was incapable of self-support. In the house he was useful, helping the mother whom he loved in many ways, and proving a docile and comforting son to her. The young men who boarded with her, touched by the pathos of her story and his helplessness, showed him much kindness, often taking him to their clubs for a dinner or a game of billiards. He in turn repaid their consideration with affection and trust. The poor mother wrapped certain pitiful remnants of pride about her battered soul; her son's infirmity was never touched upon nor recognised by her or by others; this, Dr. Hale believed, was the first time that she had been known to allow publicly that he was not as others. How pitiful! His eyes filled. To his amazement he found tears on his cheeks; he wiped them furtively away and stamped furiously on the icy snow, trying to believe that they were caused by the stinging cold.

Presently he was joined by Mr. Brown, the detective. They walked silently in the direction of Mrs. Waite's home.

"Strange woman, Mrs. Waite!" said the detective conversationally. By tacit consent he and the doctor ignored the object of their visit and the scene they had just left. "Very odd woman. So quiet and so retiring. Must be worth a pile too. You would never think it to look at her."

"No?" said the doctor listlessly. "I have not met her."

"Ah! you might live in Montreal a long time without knowing her. She's always up to her ears in charitable work and she doesn't care for society. Must be a bit of a miser, I fancy. She let the big house General Shaftan left her and has lived ever since in this little old-fashioned house in a side street. Quite big enough for one woman and two servants, I should say; still, when you think she must be worth at least half a million——"

"So much as that?"

"Oh, quite. And she certainly doesn't spend five thousand a year—on herself, that is. Of course she gives a good deal to charity, I understand; but that may be exaggerated, for one doesn't see her name in the papers. Queer life for a woman to lead, eh? Oh, well, if she has neither husband nor child I suppose it doesn't matter much what she does; she's of no account in the world anyway——"

"Oh, I don't agree with you there," said the doctor, his sense of justice compelling him to rouse himself a little. "The women who have organised these milk stations and saved thousands of lives by so doing are, many of them, childless and widows. Not that it's right; I believe in a woman being a wife and a mother before she is anything else; but if she can't be——"

"She may as well save thousands of lives, eh?" suggested the detective, breaking into a hearty laugh. "I never looked at it in that light before. Come to

think of it, there must be trained nurses and matrons for charitable institutions and so on; and they can't be married very well. Perhaps it is just as well that there aren't enough men to go round," he finished comfortably.

The doctor assented absently. It did not occur to either of them that many of the widows and spinsters to whom they referred had refused more men than had the married women whom they were popularly supposed to spend their empty lives in envying.

"Queer thing about Mrs. Waite, though!" Brown went on after a short pause. "No one ever heard of her till General Shaftan died. She was keeping house for somebody in Montreal—decayed gentleman business, you understand! He was the chap who distinguished himself in the Boer war and brought so much honour on Canada; and when he returned to Montreal all the fine ladies in town made a dead set at him. I tell you he was the fine looking fellow! big and soldierly and well-set-up! But he was dying when he returned, and finally he had to give in to his trouble, whatever it was, and keep to his bed. When he died, it was found that he had left everything to this Mrs. Waite 'in the hope,' the will read, 'that this lady would become his wife before he died.' There's for you! This little thin, plain housekeeper whom nobody had even thought of in connection with the General. It shows that the best of us have our weak points. Mrs. Waite must have good blood in her, though," the detective continued, in a tone of respect. "Look at those relatives of hers.

They might be duchesses. Miss Carne's grandfather was her father's cousin. Second cousin, eh? No mistake as to her ancestry—Miss Carne's."

"What—what's that you say?"

"I said, no mistake as to her ancestry. She must have come of a long line of aristocrats to get that look. You don't get it in a few generations. Of course lots of the aristocracy are mushroom growths"—the detective branched off into a long and irrelevant discussion while Dr. Hale listened silently.

CHAPTER XVIII

POWERS OF DARKNESS

"May no ill dreams disturb my rest,
No powers of darkness me molest."

—HYMN.

THE origin of dreams was unknown ; it was certain that a nervous, hysterical man who, for some cause or other, had been badly frightened, was likely to have unpleasant dreams. Could a dream be so startling, so vivid in its effect, as to slay like a bullet? Stranger things had been. The landlady too had had queer dreams. Most obvious, the whole thing! She had seen the disturbed condition of her lodger, had heard of his broken engagement, had perhaps heard too of Miss Carne's strange powers. What more natural than that subconsciously she should have connected the whole and that it should have appeared in a bizarre form in sleep. As for the fact of Aubrey's dying about the time she had the dream, that was pure coincidence. The only aspect of the whole matter that left a disagreeable impression in his mind was the fact that Theodora Carne evidently told terrifying things to her lovers ; things that concerned her apparently, else why should they result in these broken engagements. Without doubt,

the girl was peculiar. Yesterday he had thought that she took pleasure in playing pranks on feeble-minded idiots; to-day he did not feel so sure. After all, it was a senseless form of amusement, and one would think that she would tire of it. No; there might be a further explanation. He did not like the look of it.

However, as he neared Mrs. Waite's house his mood altered. Poor girl! she could not have cared much for Aubrey, yet his death would undoubtedly be a shock to her. Would it be better to see the mother first? He asked the detective, who approved of the suggestion.

"You will let me speak to her, Brown?" he asked as they seated themselves in the drawing-room. "I know the daughter and have met her, so it will be less alarming."

"Certainly," agreed Brown.

It was not Mrs. Carne however, but Theodora, who entered the room two minutes later. So softly did she move on the thick carpets that they were unconscious of her presence until she stood before them.

"My mother is out," she began; then, catching sight of Dr. Hale, broke off. "How do you do, Dr. Hale? Have you and your friend called on business of some sort, or is this just a friendly visit?"

"It is a friendly visit certainly," said Dr. Hale, smiling. "Still, there is business as well—rather sad business perhaps. This is Mr. Brown of the—my friend is Mr. Brown, Miss Carne. May we ask a few questions?"

"Certainly."

"It is not that we want to know so particularly," burst in the detective at this juncture, "it is just that we should be grateful if you would—if you would——"

Hale stared at him in amazement. Brown had not, hitherto, impressed him as a fool.

Theodora's great eyes rested on the detective for a moment.

"You remind me," she said softly, "of the old woman who asked after her neighbour's health and added, 'Not that I care a curse!' Surely if you will feel gratitude at my answering questions, it must be because they are important ones."

"You are right, Miss Carne," said the doctor solemnly. "Mr. Brown is embarrassed because he fears that you may be. I know you better, and think it fair to come to the point at once. Yesterday your engagement to Mr. Martin Aubrey was broken, was it not? Will you be good enough to tell us something about—about the broken engagement——?" He stopped.

The beautiful pallor of Theodora's curved cheek was perhaps a little more evident than usual; otherwise she gave no sign of uneasiness. "That," she answered slowly, as if thinking, "is a rather unusual request. I do not quite understand it."

"Mr. Aubrey," said the doctor, with equal slowness, "is—not well this morning. As his physician, I should like to know if you can give me any clue to—to his sudden indisposition."

"Not well!"

Suddenly she started to her feet. "Not well!" she repeated in tones that rang. "Dr. Hale, you are deceiving me. He is dead."

"He is dead."

She stood for a moment as though poised for flight. Her eyes were the only live things in her face. Strange lights flickered in their depths, curious gleams of dusky colour. Presently she sank into a chair.

"Tell me!" she said unevenly.

They told her all—all that was known as yet. She listened intently.

"It is horrible," she muttered, "horrible!"

"Horrible, indeed. You will not wish to be called upon at the inquest; I thought, therefore, that it would be well to acquaint you with the fact of his death and to ask if you can throw any light upon—well, upon the causes that led to it."

She shot a glance at him from beneath her curling lashes. "Throw any light?" she repeated slowly. "Throw any light—ah, yes! Mr. Aubrey dies in the night, apparently from shock, though the cause is not ascertained; you wish to know if I can give any clue to the cause."

"Exactly."

"In other words, you think that his broken engagement may have had something to do with his death."

"I have not said so."

"You have wondered!" she said, smiling. "You are wondering now why I take it so calmly. But I cannot feel that death is the tragedy that others think it. Who

knows what Mr. Aubrey may have been spared! Perhaps Herod was really a philanthropist when he murdered the innocents. Perhaps the city of Montreal, in the past, has been philanthropic in murdering hundreds of babies every year; for it is murder to let a child starve at your door for want of a piece of ice or a bottle of fresh milk, just as surely as it is murder to put a bullet through it; though it is crueller murder and deserves severer punishment. But we wander from the point. I will tell you all that I have to tell in few words. Mr. Aubrey and I decided that we were not suited to one another. We agreed to break the engagement. Mr. Aubrey said a good deal, and went away in a state of great excitement. I did not leave the house again—it was about five when he went—but remained indoors until bed-time. Let me see; I think I went to bed about eleven, after a quiet evening spent in the house with my mother and cousin."

"Did you sleep well?"

She started. "Not very well," she answered inaudibly. "I—I suppose the interview with Mr. Aubrey had rather harrowed me. As a matter of fact, I rose about one and went to another room, where I threw myself upon a sofa and went at once to sleep. I breakfasted in bed, as I usually do, about nine o'clock."

The detective suddenly moved. A thought had struck him; a curious idea.

"You left your warm bed in the middle of the night," he said, as if puzzled, "and went to an adjoining room, where you threw yourself on a sofa. This

is January, and last night was distinctly frosty. Did you not take cold?"

"I never take cold," she answered, looking at him in surprise. "But last night I caught up the first thing that came to hand—a lace wrap of which I am fond—and flung it around me as I left the room. The sofa has cushions and a fur rug. I put that over me. I was not cold."

"Ah!" said the detective involuntarily.

Dr. Hale looked at him in surprise.

"If you have nothing more to ask Miss Carne," he observed, "we may as well go on. Good-morning, Miss Carne. Please forgive us for troubling you. It was necessary. Good-morning."

After the men left, Theodora moved to the fireplace and stood staring into the flames. Her hands were clasped, her figure tense.

"So I really killed him," she whispered. "He is really dead." She moaned. Then she stood, staring mechanically into the flames, till at last her eyes grew glazed and expressionless and gleamed with horror.

Like dead things coming to life, far-off memories stirred and cried. Her deep eyes grew inky with terror. Closing them with a sudden faintness, she saw the ancient home of her race—the grey battlements black with age, the dense foliage of the wood—and, in the depths of that wood the form of a woman, clouded and veiled by red-gold hair. She knew—who better!—what lurid thoughts swam within that woman's soul, crying to be released, to be made action. The woman slowly raised the red-gold head,

and turned upon her the mournful mystery of two dark eyes—she shrieked aloud; consciousness left her; she was alone in a great darkness; roaring waves surged and fell in her deafened ears . . . yet through it all she was cognisant of a form of terror—a White and Fearful Form with all-seeing eyes, full of hatred and condemnation. At the dread of it, reason left her; she shrieked and gibbered; foam gathered on her lips; she stretched wild arms across chaos! . . . and awoke, panting and shivering, to find herself in bed. Her mother and Dr. Hale conversed in low tones by her side.

"The shock was too much for her," he whispered. "She bore it so well at the time. . . . Is she subject to these attacks?"

"Yes."

"They are, of course, nervous; there is no organic trouble?"

"None!" Mrs. Carne's white lips hardly framed the word.

"I suppose that a shock of any kind——"

"Yes."

"I can do little unless you give me further details," he went on, hesitating. "If you could——"

"There is no cause for alarm," she interrupted hastily. "She never seems to suffer any ill effects afterwards. Just at the time they are alarming——"

"They may be more serious than you suppose," said Dr. Hale, his face darkening in a displeased fashion. "People do not always recover from such severe swoons."

"When—when my daughter is somewhat better," said Mrs. Carne faintly, "I—I shall ask her—if she cares to consult you further. It is in her hands—she has something of a prejudice against doctors, I am sorry to say——"

"Ah! She is conscious now!" said the doctor hastily. "Just keep her in bed for a day or two, Mrs. Carne; and if she finds difficulty in sleeping, these tablets——"

"Thank you, Dr. Hale," said Theodora clearly. "I am quite well; I need no medicine. I suppose I fainted?"

"Yes. Your mother passed me on the steps. When she saw your condition she ran out and called me, and we did what we could for you. You feel better now, do you not?"

"Oh, yes. I am ashamed to say that I often faint like this. I recover directly, though. I must not keep you any longer from your other patients, Dr. Hale. Thank you for coming back."

"Mother!" she added, when he had left the room. "It was foolish of you—you must have known that it was foolish."

"Ah, yes, Theodora," muttered the poor lady. "But if you had seen yourself. I was terrified——"

"There was no cause for terror," said her daughter distinctly. Then she turned and lay with her face to the wall, while her mother crept silently from the room.

By the end of that day Montreal was in the grip of a panic as irrational as it was sudden. Aubrey's

death; Mrs. Somers' strange vision, which had in some way become known; the broken engagement; the repeating of the Witch happenings;—all made up a sum of sensation such as the lively matter-of-fact city had never before known. A pall of horror settled on the place. No one dared to avow openly that he considered Theodora responsible for her lover's death, yet few dared to scoff at the supposition. The libraries were ransacked for books dealing with witchcraft; and on the following Sunday two sermons were preached on the subject of the Witch of Endor and on the demoniacal possessions mentioned in the Bible.

Dick Herrod, when approached by inquirers, angrily refused to discuss his accident.

"I saw a dog and it gave me a start," he averred. "Now drop the subject! Did it look like anyone? Hang it all, what fool question will I be asked next? I broke my collar bone and it's mended, that's all. I don't know anything about poor Aubrey or—or anyone else. All I want is to be left in peace. I absolutely refuse to discuss the matter!"

Mr. Merton, however, was not so reticent, and where there was such a nucleus of incident for report to feed upon, it is not perhaps surprising that report waxed fat. Mr. Michael O'Callaghan averred solemnly that Miss Carne had taken the shape of a bat and had flown in his face one day as he was cleaning out the cellar. Had Mr. O'Callaghan been questioned carefully his interrogators would have discovered that the bat—who was not Theodora!—had flown in his face before she came to the city; but he did not

think it necessary to mention so trivial a detail. As for the Witch of Carne, the number of strange murders and maimings that were laid to her credit by everyone who had talked with Lord Haviland at any time would have filled a whole police record. Each occult happening that has attracted attention during the past hundred years attached itself to the Witch in the minds of Montrealers; and the panic of her fearsome descendant waxed large.

Next in importance to the reincarnated Witch was the annual ball to be given in the Sherwood Hall. All who were socially important and a number who were not would attend it; the question on everyone's lips was,—would Miss Carne? She had been seen little since the death of Aubrey. The inquest had implicated no living being, but rumour was not so charitable. Whether she was aware of the black legends that hung about her no one knew. When seen, she was pale and inscrutable as ever. It was noteworthy, though, that the only constant visitors at the Waite house since the—murder, as people called it—had been Father Munn, Dr. Hale and Mrs. Amherst. Father Munn, being a saint, was, of course, generally acquitted of common sense; Dr. Hale was attending her, it was supposed, in a professional capacity; and Mrs. Amherst—well, Mrs. Amherst generally did as she chose.

Montreal waited and, as it were, held its breath.

CHAPTER XIX

LIFE FOR LIFE

"Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live."

"Life shall go for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot."

—THE BIBLE

THERE is a certain pleasure to be found in battling with adverse conditions, and in making them conform to one's will. There is a certain pleasure to be found in keeping a steady smile and a care-free exterior while walking through hell. Let us hope that these pleasures are known to few.

Whether clad in fur or feather or smooth skin; whether bird or man or beast; we all join, willing or unwilling, in the struggle for food and breathing space, and fall, still fighting, into our late or early graves. Some have the warrior nature. Others fight because impelled to, and none the worse for that. It is possible that Boadicea, under the unnatural and perverted conditions which prevailed in England a few hundred years after her death, might have dragged out a blameless life weaving tapestry and smirking at love-sick troubadours. Again, had she lived to-day, she might have waged a cruel war with circumstances and died, unknown to fame, a greater

hero than the Warrior Queen. It is probable, though, that Boadicea, whenever and wherever she lived, would have fought a good fight, would have refused to let circumstances, however painful or powerful, dominate her, would have lived and died a Queen.

That queer little spark of life which makes queens and warriors and martyrs caused Theodora to don a gorgeous gown and attend the Regent's Ball. She was silent while making ready; but, when she moved into the ballroom where the dancing had already begun, she showed no sign of mental conflict. Her blood answered to the sound of the trumpet; the fury of the battle gave her life. She knew that by most of that vast crowd she was regarded as a murderer, she believed that the crowd judged rightly; yet she walked into their midst as the Warrior Queen might have trod her disdainful way over the Roman corpses.

The music, the gaudy streamers, the brilliant lights, the snowy shoulders and rose-wreathed heads, the gay floating laughter and incessant hum of voices—all dwindled into insignificance as Theodora appeared, moving so lightly that she seemed to float rather than walk as a water-lily might float on a placid stream. Her gleaming head was bound about with a glittering, sparkling band; her deeply-fringed eyes looked calmly out from beneath her delicately arched brows. A shimmering white gown clung closely to the lines of her figure, flinging back hues of azure, rose, and crimson, as the light fell on the crystals with which it was studded; a blood-red scarf thrown loosely over

her shoulder accentuated the strange pallor of her face. White-armed, glittering, mystical, she moved slowly through the room; and the dancers made way as though for some apparition from another world.

"What unearthly beauty!"

The murmur of uncontrollable admiration rose and swelled and died. Dr. Hale, on whose arm Theodora leaned, glowed with pride and delight. He was a man to whom success was everything. Success in his profession; not the success which attracts a fashionable clientele, but the success which means the reluctant admiration and recognition of men of superior talent—this was what he had lived for until he saw Theodora. Then he had craved success of another kind, and again he had obtained it. He had known her only a few weeks, yet she had consented to become his wife.

Now he saw her, in her turn, the conqueror of success. These people hated her, were jealous of her beauty, invented curious tales about her, tried to make her a pariah. Yet, at the first sight of her surprising beauty, they surrendered unconditionally. From the moment of her entrance she might have been the only woman in the room. His heart swelled as he watched her. He was, indeed, very much in love. Love was to have a part in his life from henceforth, side by side with Science, which hitherto had claimed his entire devotion. Love, however, he reflected, was worthy of the high place which he had accorded it.

Love has been defined by science as "the attraction between the sexes." Yet everything that is high or

kind in human nature declares it to be more than that. Pagan Love was born of Venus; but Christian love was born of something diviner and more awful—the Veiled Something which scientists call the First Cause, moderns, God the Father, ancient Greeks, the Unknown God, and ancient Hebrews, wiser still, by a Name which it was not lawful to utter. Some love is the child of Venus, other love the child of God. In neither case does the bare, scientific dogma satisfy. Edward Hale's love was about to undergo trial by fire, before he slept again; and the fierce element was to show him unmistakably of what fibre that love consisted.

Theodora stood silently according dances to the throng which pressed about her. She showed no sign of pleasure at their attentions, but stood, bowing gravely from one to the other, and assenting quietly to their remarks. The orchestra burst into a new waltz, a wild wailing melody full of pain. She looked up with a startled air as it crept through the ball-room. The barbaric music struck an answering chord in her heart, the strange heart that could not voice its desires nor its pangs. Dead forgotten things surged within her as she listened; remembered sorrows chilled her pulsing blood. She knew. Knew that all this was what had been before; knew that her salvation yet hung on the whim of a man; knew that the dead face of Aubrey yet stared unavenged in the desolation of a coffin. A strong shudder passed over her at the thought of the probable condition of that face . . . which had kissed hers. Too horrible!

The music stabbed her. She turned quickly to Hale. "Let us dance!" she breathed. "Let us dance! I am tired of standing."

They danced, again and yet again, while the ballroom watched, half envious, half repelled. One of the greatest of American writers has told us to test a woman's beauty by the amount of light and dress that she can stand. Beneath the blazing, searching, ballroom lights Theodora still looked as the pagan daughters of song and fable may have looked in the birth-time of the planet. No flaw was there; no blemish; nothing that the most hypercritical could have wished altered. Yet perfection is chilling, and not a few who watched the serpentine movements of the English girl were conscious of a strong feeling of repulsion and of terror.

Meanwhile Theodora danced. Life had relented and showed only the beauty of her face, only the glamour of her presence. Theodora had forgotten the silent, accusing dead; she had forgotten the whispering, fearful living; she remembered only that she was young and that the man whom she loved as she had never loved any other human being was with her and wholly absorbed in her. What if the others had failed to stand the test! he was not like others; he was strong and self-sufficient and steadfast, and he loved her more than he had ever loved another woman. Poor Theodora! a Witch and a dangerous one perhaps, in some respects, but a very child in others!

He had left her to claim another partner; she was standing by the wall, listening to the music as only

the children of the sun can listen, with lips apart and eyes distended by the beauty of the chords, when she heard a commotion at the other end of the ball-room. Some one had burst through the dancers and was making his way rapidly to where she stood; a queer drooping figure of a man with crazed, staring eyes, and a face terrible in its detachment and its whiteness.

She gazed at him absently as he approached, with great, vague eyes to which her clinging lashes lent softness. Then . . . she became aware of a stir and a confusion about her. People were rushing in all directions, were shouting to her; she was alone, leaning against the wall——

“Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live!”

The words pierced her brain. She looked, stiffened, stood erect; her eyes lost vagueness and concentrated like knives.

“See! the Witch! the Witch! She killed poor Mr. Aubrey—look! look at the blood she is clothed in! see the crimson stains floating about her! the blood of the men who have loved her. And that was not enough, she was not satisfied; she had to kill my mother!”

At the words the tension of Theodora’s attitude relaxed; she shuddered and cowered. “No, no,” she muttered to herself distractedly. But, as she withdrew her eyes from the madman’s face, he was upon her with one bound.

“You killed my mother!” he shrieked, “and you shall die!” He clutched her bare throat with one hand and raised a gleaming knife in the other.

The ballroom became a scene of chaos; women screamed unnoticed; men started forward, then drew back. Theodora stood, her throat in the madman's clasp, her eyes staring into his eyes. The knife was still poised aloft as though her assailant had been paralysed in the act of striking; his right hand worked convulsively yet harmlessly. Theodora's hands lay loosely by her side; she made no effort to move; only the living things in her eyes flickered and darted straight into the assassin's brain.

For a moment only they remained thus; the next, Somers' hand was flung up, the knife was seized and flung to one side, and Hale, with furious strength, hurled himself on the distraught boy. The latter made no resistance, allowed himself to be overpowered and knocked to the ground, and only stared vacantly when they secured his hands. Theodora still leaned against the wall, watching. Only once, when some one touched the young man roughly, she started and cried, "Be careful! you are hurting him!" Then she turned and moved slowly towards the door.

It was the work of a few moments to put the bound man into a closed sleigh and drive him to the police station. Then the entire room, waking from its apathy and shock, clustered about Theodora, applauding, congratulating, exclaiming. Never was such nerve, such self-command! never was such a wonderful escape! Theodora listened to them in silence; her eyes had lost their fierce gleam, and were dull and old; she no longer seemed a girl. When Dr. Hale came towards her, smiling and a little white, she touched him on

the arm, saying in a low voice, "I should like to leave, Edward; will you take me?"

"Surely," he answered. "It would be splendid, though, if you were to stay and have one dance with me, in the face of all this. Then, indeed, you would show the stuff you were made of. Then, indeed——"

"I do not care to," she replied listlessly. "I want to go. Tell me one thing: is Mrs. Somers dead?"

"I believe so," he said gravely. "She died an hour ago—I don't know in what way. She has never been well since——since——"

"I understand!" she answered, and said no more. When she met him at the door of the hall, heavily veiled, he was startled by the dejection of her attitude.

"This has been too much for you, Theodora, has it not?" he said gently. She smiled at him in a wan way.

"Yes. But not—not what you think. I have something to say to you, Edward, something that I must say to-night. It will not take long—an hour, perhaps. It is quite early. Will you come with me to my home and will you listen?"

"If you think it best," he replied unwillingly. "But surely, Theodora, after all that has happened, you will not wish to agitate yourself further to-night?"

"It must be to-night," she answered: and he said no more.

CHAPTER XX

THE TIGER'S SPRING

"Alas, the love of women . . . if 'tis lost,
Their revenge is as the tiger's spring,
Deadly and quick and crushing; yet as real
Torture is theirs; what they inflict they feel."

—BYRON.

"Less than the dust beneath thy chariot wheel,
Less than the trust thou hast in me, my Lord,
Even less am I."

—LAURENCE HOPE.

THEODORA entered the small study on the left of the Waite house, turned on the lights, and offered her companion a chair. The room was upholstered in warmest crimson; against its rich colouring she looked even paler than usual. Dr. Hale silently accepted the chair she indicated, and prepared to listen, though unwillingly.

She sat down beside him and, for a moment, seemed lost in thought. He knew that speech came slowly to her, and waited. Presently she spoke, evenly and deliberately.

"Before I begin I must tell you that what I am about to say is so improbable, so fantastic, that you will find it difficult to believe. Yet, in order to judge

fairly, you must hear everything. Will you therefore promise to listen in silence until I have finished, no matter how absurd my tale may sound? Will you promise that?"

"It would be only fair," he allowed.

"Then——"

She leaned forward, gazing into the crimson shadows. Her face contracted.

"Ah!" she muttered, in a curious, stifled way, "this—this is punishment!" Her voice caught and strangled in her throat.

"You are not crying? You are not going to cry?" exclaimed the doctor, starting to his feet.

"Please sit down. I never cry."

"No," he said, with involuntary admiration, "no, I cannot imagine you in tears. You have far too much self-control."

She sighed wearily. "That is not the reason," she answered, in a dull voice. "I would give a great deal to be able to weep, but the gift of tears has been denied me. Yet, O Edward, believe me, it is not because of anything I have done in *this* life; and not because I have not begged for help and for forgiveness. Before I knew Father Munn I did not know that I could pray; ever since I have prayed—oh, how I have prayed! I have been answered; answered by two murders, one of which leaves an orphaned, deranged boy, deprived of the mother who loved and shielded him, at the mercy of a hard world. He will never want for anything that money can give him

while I live; but the mother who loved him lies dead—killed by me.”

“Theodora! You are mad!”

“I knew you would say so. It is what they all say—till they know. You are going to know. You have heard, of course, the tales that have been told about me—the tales of the Witch of Carne who killed by magic and—and disappeared when—when One was mentioned?”

“Yes, I have heard those senseless legends and lies. What on earth——”

“Edward, I ask you solemnly to believe that they are not lies; that the cruellest of them is less dreadful than the dreadful, dreadful truth. I tell you,” her voice faltered a little, then grew firm, “that the woman with whom you have danced to-night, and whom you have asked to be your wife, stands before you with the stain of nine murders on her hands.”

“Theodora!”

“Of nine murders. The first when I was eight. The last and cruellest—to-night. Of some I was not even suspected; and of the rest I could never be convicted. For it was not my mortal hand that sped the knife or the bullet; it was my accursed soul, looking through my accursed eyes, that killed those miserable beings. Oh, I have writhed and agonised and begged that no more victims need be offered up. I have waited and longed and prayed for the one being who could help me. But he has never come, and the ghastly cup of murder has brimmed over, ending to-night with the foulest and most dreadful crime of all—the mur-

der of the miserable woman who was the whole stay and support of her still more miserable son. But to-night ends it. If I am mistaken in you, if you are not the saviour who will drag me out of this slough of despair and misery, I shall endure this earth no longer. Hell, in preference!"

In the midst of his dismay and astonishment, the doctor could not help noting curiously that the name "saviour" apparently held no associations for Theodora.

"You know," she continued, speaking in a quieter voice, "you have heard, of course, the history of the Witch?"

"I have heard it, yes."

"You know that, when she returned to earth, she was to find salvation if she could discover a human soul that would love her better than itself?"

"Yes."

"Then you see the reason for my many engagements and for their sudden end. Men fall in love with me and promise to do anything—everything for me; and when I tell them—as I always do—what I am telling you—they rush out of my sight with horror and repulsion. That was what Herrod did, what Aubrey did——"

"By Jove! So that was it!"

"Yes. Herrod was gentlemanly; he stammered and stuttered and looked at the ground, and merely said, in a queer voice, that he respected my confidence, but that he was sure I must see that marriage was out of the question. Then he left the room, looking

very sick. I was unhappy and resentful and deeply, deeply disappointed; I sent black thoughts of malice and indignation after him from which he suffered; but he never roused in me the torrent of hate and fury which Aubrey did. You see, I only accepted Aubrey in despair; he was so insignificant, so puny, so unlike any of the other men whom I had taken, that I believed that, because of the difference, he might be the one appointed. He, however, was crueller and more insulting than anyone else had ever been to me; he thrust me away from him; he bellowed with rage and stamped his foot, and accused me—me!—of gaining his love under false pretences; he called me crazy, wicked, dangerous; he shivered with fear when I, infuriated, turned my face on him; he burst out of the house with a yell which anyone might have heard. No one had ever treated me so; my rage was suffocating. I have a violent, revengeful nature, I do not take opposition calmly; and the sight of him—the little, worthless, over-civilised atom—despising me who am, whatever else I am, at least primitive and powerful—the sight of it, I tell you, drove me mad with rage. Still I did not mean to kill him—I swear that I did not mean to kill him. On the contrary, knowing the danger of my passions, I kept my thoughts steadily turned from him all the evening. But, when I went to bed, my rage mastered me; I tossed and turned, half mad to think that even this poor, insignificant thing—as I thought him—refused to save me. At last I rose, as I told you, threw a lace wrap about me, and tried to see if I could get sleep on a strange bed.

I slept; and in my dreams that part of me that never sleeps rose and winged its way straight to Aubrey's side. There I killed him; the worst of me, released from the bondage of my will, killed him, the poor coward, as he lay; roused him from sleep, interpenetrated him with the poison of my contempt and rage; then, satisfied, returned. I awoke! My hands were trembling; my rage had subsided; I knew. I hastily struck a light and looked at my watch; it was eight minutes past three. At that moment I thought of the landlady, Mrs. Somers—why, I cannot say!—just thought of her and of what her feelings would have been could she have seen the killing. I did not know that I had made her see it; so powerful are the impressions which my brain conveys to other brains that any thought of mine is apt to be fraught with fatal issues. In this case they were fatal only to me, I hoped; but, no—she was marked for death from the instant she crossed my path. Only in her case the poison did not work immediately as in the other cases, which makes me wonder whether nine is really the number of my murders or whether——”

The doctor stirred restlessly. “Must I listen to this?”

“You must. I have your promise. I can see that you do not believe me. But wait! I must return to the beginning of things, must tell you my whole history. First, you will ask, how do I know that I am the Witch? There has never been a moment in my life when I did not know that I was the Witch. As a child I knew it; I read it in the eyes of the peasants

as they passed me; of my mother as she fondled me; of my nurses as they tended me. It was written on my heart. It was written too on my parents' hearts; I have never asked how they too knew it; but they did know, and the knowledge killed my father——"

"Absurd!"

"If it only were! My first definite knowledge of what I was came to me on the night my father died. He was delirious and carried me down to the picture gallery—evidently to convince himself that I was not what he suspected. Alas! No sooner did he reach the wall where the likeness of the Witch hung, no sooner did he move towards the picture—than, baby as I was, I struggled with all my might, with the frantic struggles of one who tries to escape an impending doom. I knew! How I knew I cannot tell you. A deadly faintness and terror overcame me. I knew that when he turned the picture towards me I should see my own face staring back, my own face grown to evil womanhood; my face that had cursed the House of Carne, that had made generations of women dread the bringing of me into the world of matter. Until, at last, the doom fell on one who least deserved it—my poor mother! Oh, how I struggled! Just then some one spoke, demanding that my father should put me down; it saved, I am sure, my reason, or at least my life. They led my father off broken-hearted. I was glad when I heard that he was dead. Though I loved him better than all the world and though something broke within me at his death, yet I could not have borne to look into his living eyes as I looked into his

dead ones that night. Oh, how I envied my mother who could weep! My soul felt gropingly that there was Some One Who could help human sorrow; but it was borne in upon me cruelly and inexorably that for some reason this Being would not help me, and that my mother knew it. I was never a child again from that night; the doom had fallen and I kept waiting, waiting, wondering when I should know what then I only dimly felt. It was a relief to me when I did know——”

“When was that?”

“When I was about nine. No one had ever spoken to me of the Witch, but one day, as I was rummaging in a disused bookcase in the library, I came upon an old book which contained legends of noble houses. Among them was the story of the Witch of Carne. Then I knew. All my characteristics were hers—every feature they described—her red-gold hair, like a fiery cloak, her black, piercing eyes, the alabaster delicacy and colourlessness of her skin—all, all were mine. Even her tricks, her way of gliding noiselessly, of speaking little—though I was a child, the likeness was unmistakable. Perhaps I should not have seen the likeness so clearly had it not been that already, in some unaccountable way, I knew. I had never been able to place it—the knowledge—but I had always known that I was not like other people. When I read the words that caused her—not death, but disappearance!—then I knew. In a burst of horrible enlightenment I remembered the unaccountable swoons that had always followed the hearing of One Word.

Hitherto I had not understood the reason for these swoons; now I dropped the book on the floor and flung my head down on my arms, not daring to read further. Finally I picked it up and read on, till I came to the prophecy of her return. And then,—oh, rapture of the thought! I saw that she might be saved, might be like others. One thing only was needed; the love of a good man. Surely, thought I, in my childish ignorance, that should not be hard to find. I had always heard and read in fairy tales of men falling in love with beauty, and already I had been told, a hundred times, that I was extraordinarily beautiful. I did not remember the sinister fatality that followed my—ancestress, shall I call her? or my former self?—I did not remember that, although her beauty won unlimited admiration, it never gained an unselfish or a pitying love even from the one whom she worshipped. No; I thought I had only to wait for womanhood in order to be rescued from the Dark Powers which encompassed me.

“More emboldened and happier than I had ever been since my father’s death, I decided on what was, to me, a fearful proceeding. I would make conviction certainty. Alone, I would visit the picture gallery, would look at the Witch’s portrait. I went then and there. Arrived at the picture, my legs trembled under me, but with a tremendous effort of will I flung the picture round. Oh, what words can describe the horror of that moment! My own eyes, wicked beyond belief, mesmeric, haunting, stared back at me; my own mouth smiled mockingly; my own hair curled

crisply back as though scorched by the burning, unhallowed blood that lay beneath the white flesh. But that was the least of the horror. As I looked, the forbidden Name rose in my mind,—I saw a phantom of hell with fearful eyes which looked into my soul and doomed that soul to hell. With a shriek I grovelled before the Figure, not daring even to ask for mercy; though no one had ever spoken of Him to me I knew Him—the Being who had power to curse the soul. With that shriek reason left me; I wandered in dark, perplexed labyrinths of terror; till at last I awoke to find myself lying in the library while my nurse bathed my forehead and wept in a terrified way by my side.

“I do not know whether she had found me and carried me out, or whether—I never asked. From that day forth I knew my doom, and knew too what might avert it. I will pass over other things: the child who offended me and whom I killed in the night, much as I killed Aubrey; these things are too painful to dwell upon. Suffice it to say that at last my mother determined to take me abroad, and that from that time on my life changed somewhat. While I was still very young, I found that there would be little trouble—as I fondly imagined—in finding a redeemer. Men flocked about me, followed me; I had only to appear to become the cynosure of all attentions; while on every side I saw girls and women trying to attract, vainly attempting to accomplish that which I compassed with a look. But what did it matter? Soon, soon I found that whatever the protestations of these

men the result of my confidences was always the same. When they knew they left me. Sated with admiration as I was this treatment never failed to rouse black and angry resentment. I struggled against it, trying to realise that my punishment was just and their repulsion natural; but ever and again my doomed soul would add another deed of horror to the many that weighed me down. This was the cruellest and strangest thing to me: that I could get anything, anything in the world except the one thing that I wanted, the thing that I saw less attractive women receiving on every hand. I used to amuse myself—wrongly, you will think—by making some of these women my slaves; by making them do as I wished.”

“Hypnotism?”

“That is the modern word for it, I believe. My brain still thinks in mediæval terms and calls it witchcraft.”

“But, Theodora, if you then have this power—and I have seen proof of it—why could you not hypnotise your lovers into loving you in spite of your delus—I mean—er!—disadvantages?”

“Oh, how can you ask such a question? I knew that love must be a free gift from some man to me, not an ordered thing that emanated from my own brain. I tried earnestly to free my lovers from all mesmeric charm in order that I might obtain the one desired boon from Heaven. But terror and repulsion were all that I received. Whether they believed me to be telling the horrible and shameful truth, or whether they believed me the victim of mania, the result was

always the same—till you came. Now—oh, Edward, is there any hope? You do not turn from me. Is it possible? Can it be possible that you—in spite of everything——”

Dr. Hale frowned a little and moved uneasily. His interest in the tale had caused him to forget its personal application.

“My dear Theodora,” he began, in an altered voice, “you must remember that I am, first and last, a physician.”

She started and turned toward him. Her quick ears had caught the inflection in his voice; that voice which had hitherto been filled only with reverent love and admiration.

“Go on,” she said, in a small, strange voice.

Dr. Hale cleared his throat and paused for a moment. “This is a difficult position that you put me in, Theodora,” he said slowly; “you must allow me time to arrange my thoughts before I answer.” He leaned back, gazing sombrely into space, while the woman bit her lips furtively and set her face like a mask of steel.

Dr. Hale was obliged to think before speaking. He had received a severe shock. The object of a man's love is largely the offspring of his brain. Dr. Hale had loved an image called Theodora, an imperial image which, for its very grandeur and greatness, might well be misunderstood by stupid people. Strong enough to quell mad dogs, to over-awe cowardly men, yet tender enough to be a loving wife to him, as powerful mentally as physically, as imperturbable as the

Sphinx, as normal as the first calm-eyed mother one might meet, a very queen among women. He found himself confronted by a wild-eyed, shuddering woman who, speaking with Theodora's voice, told him unutterable things, things which to his materialistic dogmatic vision showed her to be neurotic, if not hopelessly unbalanced.

Chivalry is largely the child of pity; and pity is a feminine quality, possessed only by men who have a touch of the feminine in their composition—the artist, the parent. Women are often chivalrous to women, men, seldom. Dr. Hale was a fine specimen of the purely masculine. He possessed numerous splendid qualities, but he lacked just that touch of the feminine which makes the ideal man. There was a certain vein of ice and iron in his blood, a lack of human sympathy and comprehension, a lack of charity toward that which he did not understand. His ideal, though but vaguely outlined in his own mind, was sufficiently comprehensive. He wished in a wife a being stronger and wiser than himself, one on whose judgment he could rely implicitly, one in whose tenderness he could trust; yet one who would meekly acknowledge his superiority and cheerfully bow to his decisions. With this combination of characteristics he wished of course a beautiful face and a superb form. Having found the latter, he naturally deduced the former. It is a mistake not uncommonly made.

With what did he find himself confronted? With his pet aversion—a neurotic woman! A confirmed monomaniac! A woman who seriously believed that

she was—faugh! It did not bear thinking of. Of course there was but one way to treat such nonsense—knock it on the head!

He was bitterly disappointed. True, he still “loved” Theodora; but it was not the love he had formerly felt for her. That love had been compounded in equal parts of admiration and respect; this love was unwilling infatuation, coupled with what represents pity to a man of his stamp and is, in reality, grudging acknowledgment of weakness, secretly combined with ridicule.

Theodora must be “cured” before he could marry her. She had an annoying obsession—deeply-rooted, too—which must be destroyed before she would be fit to be any man’s wife. In common with the rest of mankind he desired a wife who was perfect to begin with, and the knowledge of Theodora’s imperfections rendered him rather bitter. Still he must make the best of things. She was superbly beautiful and he still “loved” her; who could help it? She had killed his romance though with her foolish maunderings.

Alas for Dr. Hale and Theodora! When the poetry of life dies, when romance takes flight, there should be something to replace them. In this case there was little.

Dr. Hale spoke at last.

“Have you quite finished, Theodora?” he inquired in tones which were intended to be brisk.

She nodded, silently watching him.

“Then it is now your turn to listen to me. But

first let me prescribe a soothing draught and a good night's rest before——”

“No. Now!”

The supremely afflicted are usually supremely in earnest and are therefore obeyed. Dr. Hale with a darkening brow obeyed Theodora.

“Very well! If you prefer to talk it out now!” he observed, his tones gathering a little harshness. “It’s all one to me. In the first place, Theodora, you must take my word for it that you are a little upset—some-what below par.”

“My health is perfect.”

“Your mental health cannot be when you believe such absurd things. Of course, I must allow that you have been the victim of a most curious set of coincidences; but that is all. As if part of you could go forth while you were asleep, killing and maiming and generally making itself obnoxious! You are talking absolute nonsense.”

Theodora knew as little of modern psychology as did her mentor and could not therefore refute his statements. She looked at him in silence.

“You are subject to bad dreams and during these dreams friends or acquaintances of yours have had accidents for which you are as much responsible as I am. You must know that. Take ‘Rasselas’ for instance! Do you remember the man who believed that he ruled the winds? He had just as much ground for his belief as you have for yours.”

“As for the rest,” he went on, warming to his subject, “it is too absurd to mention. Do you seriously

believe that, because you have red hair, you are therefore a Witch? You are as big a fo—as foolish as those insane people in the ballroom to-night if you do think so. One can excuse the poor demented young Somers; but you—what excuse is there for you? Come, Theodora, pull yourself together; make an effort! All these delusions are easily shaken off if you will but put your mind to it. Come!”

“Have you forgotten what else I have inherited from my former self?” she asked, dully.

“What? The power over animals? Oh, that is common. Many people poss——”

“No. The power to suffer torments and almost loss of life when a certain Name is spoken in my hearing.”

“Oh!” The doctor laughed good-humouredly. “I could have a fit myself, I daresay, at the mention of soft soap if I wished. It is all a question of will. How much do you want to be rid of this obsession?”

“I need not answer that.”

“Very well then. Make up your mind that you will listen, not once, but ten times, to this word. Increase the dose daily,” he went on, in high good humour with himself, “once to-night, twice to-morrow——”

She put up her hand with a faint gesture of horror.

“Very well then,” he rejoined, his face darkening, “I can only surmise that you wish to give me up!”

She made no answer, but watched him.

“Marriage is the one thing about which we have no right to be selfish. It is not a matter of personal wish;

it is a question of the race. I could not marry a neurotic woman with hallucinations. If you would make an effort to cure yourself; if you would try to accustom yourself to hearing such words as——”

He stopped. She had not screamed. But there was a certain sharp intake of the breath which made him pause.

“Very good then!” he exclaimed harshly. “You will not hear reason, and why should I attempt to force it on you? You have made your choice; and I—mine.”

“And you—will leave me?”

“I shall leave you,” he answered curtly.

“But,” she said slowly, regarding him through the dark veil of her lashes; “but—Edward—I love you.”

He shrugged his shoulders, half in shame, half in impatience.

“You seem to have loved a good many,” he rejoined rather cruelly.

Something lit for a moment in her eye, then sank and died.

“I have promised to marry a good many,” she answered gently, “because marriage was my only road to salvation. I have only loved you—Edward, I have only loved you.” Her voice was a wail.

He half turned away.

“You—do not love me?”

He made no answer. She looked at him for a moment. Out of what unknown depths of anguish and loss her soul looked forth from her shadowy eyes!

She knew; and her lips turned as white as the ashes that show where a burning fire has raged.

"You had better go," she said dully.

Dr. Hale, without a word, rose. His conscience acquitted him of blame. She was unfit to marry. Yet he felt as though a good piece of his manhood had been scooped out of him.

As he reached the door Theodora, with one bound, stood by his side.

With every movement of her swaying figure, with every glance of her flashing eye, he saw that the fierce blood of the Oriental rioted and leaped in her veins. Gone was the slow, cool grace of yesterday; hers was the passion of the panther that sees her cub taken from her, hers the delirium of the drunkard who sees his longed-for draught dashed to the floor. She stared into his eyes with the eyes of a fiend; and her voice, when she spoke, was concentrated menace.

"You shall not go like this."

Dr. Hale was not a coward. Yet the suddenness of her movement and the devilish hatred and malediction of the face into which he gazed turned his own face grey with fear. He felt as any civilised man might feel if the cat which he had carelessly kicked had been suddenly transformed into a tiger. His heart beat loudly; he was conscious of confused and startling thoughts—recollections of the strange powers which the woman before him had averred that she possessed, averred humbly and sadly that she possessed, only half an hour ago. And this—this was she! This splendid fiend whose unhallowed nature had suddenly

leaped forth and threatened to extinguish him. Then he laughed. A strong forceful man, strong of muscle as of mind—to be afraid of a woman! A slow, dull red crept over his forehead; he raised his head haughtily. . . . She was speaking.

“You fool! You weak, miserable fool! To think that you could despise me and forsake me—for your puny scruples! Your scruples about the race! The race! Look at me. You shall love me. This is different. I let the others go—but you—I want you! I don’t care whether you want me or not; you shall marry me. If you had a drop of compassion in your blood, you would want to help me, to save me from my doom; but you have not—you think as the others thought, only of yourself. And then you think that you can leave me! Bah! Neurotic! I, neurotic?” She laughed and drew her sinuous, pliant form up to its full height. “Look at me! I look neurotic, don’t I? I look fanciful and pitiful and helpless, don’t I? Do you know what I am going to do? I am going to hypnotise you, as you call it—bewitch is the better word. Then you shall marry me. Not because I love you. I don’t. I hate you. You shall marry me and then I shall make you the laughing-stock of the city. Your practice, of which you think so much, will dwindle to nothing; you will be called the mad doctor; you will spend your life crawling after me, doing absurd tricks to compel my attention. You will like that, won’t you? Fool! I’ll teach you what it is to offend me. There! I’ve talked enough. Now I’ll do.”

She turned full on him two blazing lights of hell,

or so it seemed to Hale. He shivered at their impact; tried with despairing vehemence to turn his own eyes away; found it impossible, felt life receding, felt all about him the roar and horror of great seas. Then, through his half-submerged consciousness, darted a thought. Stretching out a hand, he pointed feebly at her, and ejaculated once, twice, three times—

“God, GOD! GOD ALMIGHTY!”

The strangled, horrible scream that rang through the house brought all its sleeping inmates to the room where Theodora lay, a helpless mass on the carpet. Dr. Hale stood by her, swaying like a drunkard, his eyes bloodshot, his face ghastly.

“She is not dead,” he ejaculated uncertainly. “She is not dead.”

He staggered to the hall, and without waiting to put on the overcoat which some one thrust at him, opened the door and rushed forth.

CHAPTER XXI

"Love's last reward—death!—comes to me to-night, Farewell!"

—LAURENCE HOPE.

"The gazelle dies in the water,
The fish dies in the air,
And I die . . . for my love that is deep and sad."

—ARAB SONG.

THE exact truth not being known people naturally believe the worst!" Father Munn observed.

"Naturally!" was Dr. Schmidt's response. "Just a little bit slower if you please—that's right! You Montrealers may be used to running up hills but I'm not."

"We call this a mountain," said Father Munn, proudly.

"Ach! I thought that was a joke," replied the German smiling. "What a marvellous hill! One moment it is a park, the next a mountain."

"And under any name it is still a joy. Wait until we reach the 'Pines' and you see the view! And then we will go away back of the topmost hill and I will show you my favourite nook of all; I try to think that no one but me has ever discovered it."

"And so we are to climb Mount Royal, penetrate to its inmost recesses and pluck out the heart of Miss Carne's mystery at one and the same time," said Schmidt. "Quite an undertaking for one short winter afternoon."

"It would be an undertaking indeed if we were to attempt to measure the credulity and cruelty of the human mind," said Father Munn sadly. "Who would have believed that here, in matter-of-fact, prosaic Montreal, a large number of people could have been found who would seriously and firmly believe that a modern young woman was a witch, possessed of evil powers which she used for evil purposes?"

Dr. Schmidt puffed at his large cigar in silence.

"It does not seem at all strange to me," he said at length.

"It doesn't?"

"No. The belief in witchcraft is as old as the human race; it must be part of race history, ready to repeat itself at favourable junctures. Do you know that, all in all, no less than nine millions of women have met with a cruel death because of this belief in witches?"

"Is it possible?"

"Not only possible but actual. Many of these millions—how many I cannot compute at the moment—were burnt alive at the stake. How real must have been the terror that permitted and authorised such excesses!"

"O Christianity, what crimes have been committed in thy name!" quoted the clergyman solemnly.

"Amid the perpetration of much that was blood-thirsty and shameful Christianity has certainly been productive of great good," said Dr. Schmidt. "Yet I cannot but feel that the Old Testament should be read as literature, not taken as a moral guide. There can be little doubt but that one verse, 'Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live,' has been responsible for many of these nine million women suffering cruel and ignominious deaths."

"Such a verse cannot of course be taken literally," said Father Munn. "In the first place we do not know the exact meaning of 'witch.' Some say that it means 'poisoner.' Then, too, it may be that the qualities which were popularly ascribed to witches—cruelty, malice—were personified in the word 'witch' and the verse may have meant that they should not be suffered to live——"

"The verse may have meant anything," said the scientist calmly. "The point is that fools have taken it to mean one thing—what it says. And, unfortunately, the fools are not all dead yet."

"You mean to say that when the demented youth attacked Theodora, quoting from the Bible, it actually had an effect on some weaklings—the quotation?"

"It had indeed. 'Words are explosives and should be handled carefully.' 'Life and death are in the power of the tongue.' Old sayings but good ones. A verse from the Bible may work more havoc than many bullets. People who have never read the Old Testament through in their lives are beginning to quote that text. If among them could be found one suffi-

ciently fanatical to be regardless of consequences I wouldn't give that for Theodora's life!"

"It is high time, then, that something be done."

"High time indeed! I believe that that one verse of which we were speaking, 'Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live,' was largely, if not entirely, responsible for the terrible epidemic of demonphobia which transformed Europe, at one time, into a vast asylum of dangerous paranoics."

"You certainly put the case strongly. Is not that rather an exaggeration?"

"Let me see," said the other, musingly. "After Pope Innocent VIII made his famous appeal to the Roman Catholic Church to rescue the Church of Christ from the power of Satan—do you remember the exact results?"

"No. There was an increase in persecution, I believe."

"I believe I can give you a few statistics with fair accuracy. Sprenger in Germany burned as many as nine hundred women in one year. The commissioners appointed by the Pope burned nearly three thousand. By the way, Sprenger, my countryman, with the thoroughness and method for which we Germans are noted, worked out a fine system of infallible rules for discovering witches. The inquisitors asked, for instance, whether the accused were in the habit of consorting with devils, whether they could raise whirlwinds, whether they could turn cream sour, whether they had ever been escorted by Satan to a 'Witches' Sabbath.' These questions did not appear so hu-

morous to the accused as they do to us, owing to the fact that they were accompanied by the boot, the thumbscrew and similar hints to answer as the inquisitor wished. Then another fact which combined to nullify the humour of the situation was that when the prisoners did plead guilty to these charges, they were invariably roasted alive amid the pious rejoicings of the nation!"

"Horrible! No wonder Mrs. Amherst laughs at the idea of chivalry, and tells us to read history when we speak of it."

"In Geneva five hundred people were burned in 1515 and 1516. In Piedmont there was a particularly pious inquisitor who managed so ably that not a family in the place but mourned their dead—slain for the crime—the purely imaginary crime—of witchcraft. In France fires for the extermination of witches burned in every town. In England that infernal fool of a James the First aided the good work by publishing his famous treatise on demonology. And then to think that we have thought it necessary to invent a devil! Certainly there was no need to invent him. He was on the spot."

"'In the seventeenth century,' says somebody, 'the world seemed to be like a large madhouse for witches and devils to play their antics in!' I don't know whose phrase that is, but it sticks in my mind. 'A large madhouse indeed!' says Boris Sidis, 'but not for witches and devils. For maniacs afflicted with the most ghastly form of *paranoia persecutoria* that the world has yet witnessed.'"

"It doesn't seem possible, does it?"

"No. But when you realise that it is literally true you can see why I am not surprised at the strange hold which this belief in the demoniacal powers of Theodora Carne has taken on the populace of Montreal. Nor should I be surprised if on being interrogated Theodora Carne were to confess to the most dreadful crimes and to the most unpardonable flirtations with the powers of evil. Any number of such cases are recorded; and indeed to this day people sometimes fall down in fits and loudly profess themselves to be evil spirits. Occasionally they claim to have lived on the earth, relate the exact circumstances of their descent into the infernal regions—and then recovering from the fit go about their business quite unconscious of the fact that they have done anything out of the common. Delusions of this sort are frequent because, the belief in demons being part of race consciousness, the subconscious mind is quite likely to seize at one time or another on some bit of superstition and store it up; thence to emerge in moments of delirium or coma."

"How little we know of ourselves."

"Little indeed. But, when we reflect that two hundred years ago, people as a whole, and people of a high grade of intelligence, believed firmly that a number of old women—yes, and young women—were in the habit of flying through space on broomsticks in order to hold secret meetings with devils—sometimes with the Arch-Fiend himself; that they habitually changed themselves into cats, dogs and wolves, in

order to worry and terrify their kind; that they fed on the flesh of young children at horrid orgies presided over by devils; when, I say, you reflect on all this, can you wonder that the appearance of so strange and mysterious a woman as Miss Carne, taken in conjunction with the alarming and sinister happenings which have followed her everywhere—can you wonder that they have impressed the public mind horribly and predisposed it to revert to the superstitions of its ancestors? And to think that that one verse ‘Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live’ is perhaps responsible for every bit of it!”

“You see,” Dr. Schmidt continued, “people as a whole do not think for themselves and so are open to suggestion. Just as, in a fire, panic will spread from one to another and hundreds will go mad with fright and sacrifice their own lives and those of others to their mad struggles for safety, while all the time they would know if they stopped to think that their best chance for safety lay in orderly retreat; so in a community the suggestible, social, subconscious self may receive a suggestion of the most ludicrous and irrational kind and follow it blindly to the death. In the Middle Ages, if some obscure person in an unknown hamlet gave a strong suggestion of any kind, it was quite likely that in a short time the whole nation would be responding to it eagerly. Witness for instance the dancing mania in 1370. Dancers by thousands left their work to pirouette in the street. ‘Scholars deserted their studies, mothers their infants, peasants the toil that gave them bread, to join in the mad

and unmeaning revels.' I forget how this started or what nation first felt the infection; but it spread all over Europe. Yes; when one reads the history of the mob and of mob suggestibility one is not surprised at the suddenness and irrationality of certain common beliefs. But the reason that I am determined to end Theodora's mania at once if at all possible, is that I believe her to be in a very dangerous position."

"You mean that she is in danger of madness?"

"No, of death. Since she has remained sane all these years it is most unlikely that her mania will end in madness now. But I am afraid that some one, a little more daring or a little more self-hypnotised than the rest, will try to kill her. The attempt has been made already you see; and unsuccessfully. A second time it may be more deliberate and therefore more successful. This youth happened to be particularly open to suggestion because of his demented condition; in an ordinary case Theodora could not have so suddenly hypnotised a man whom she saw for the first time. No, believe me there is danger in delay; and I shall have none."

"Schmidt, are there any recorded cases where very young beautiful women have been victims of this craze? I had the idea that poor old hags were the usual sufferers."

"In the seventeenth century the prettiest girl in the city of Wurzburg was accused and burned for some trifle. In the same year a little girl of nine was also killed in the same abominable manner. There is nothing in history so horrible, so inhuman, and so irra-

tional as the witch craze. The feeblest both in mind and body, children, old people, were the first to suffer. Disgusting as it is to recall we must never permit it to escape our memory; for history is your only infallible teacher. When we read history we know that nothing is too vile, nothing too irrational for the human mind to believe, for the human will to put into execution."

"Schmidt, I am sick—heart sick, when I think of these things. One despairs of human nature. Yet put it in another way: is it not equally true that nothing is too grand, nothing too beautiful for the human mind to believe, for the human will to put into execution?"

"It is I suppose, or at least may be, equally true."

"And now let us forget the horrors of the past and turn to the present. But first! Look at this!"

A soft flush, delicate as the heart of a rose, intense as the heart of a fire opal, lay upon the dreaming west, where the dark blue of late afternoon melted into the scarlet glow of evening. A pearly moon lay ghost-like in the still, blue sky. Over the milky hills of snow the pine trees rustled faintly. The men stood between the two mountains, gazing—gazing. As far below as the eye could reach all was stillness and whiteness; but in the flaring heavens banks of feathery clouds were flushed with rose and amber. The distant hills were veiled in purple; the air bit, and yet intoxicated. It was a day to stir the Viking blood and rouse the fighting instinct; a day on which life seemed not all cruel, and death not all desirable. The snow, that pale magician, cast her spell over the world, turn-

ing familiar objects into things of unreal beauty, its fainter yet more awful radiance transforming the commonplace as might the presence of death; lending majesty to the accustomed, and decking the despised with power. Cold as the cold, white earth, the spectral moon looked down. The dark-green tops of the pine trees freshened as though bathed with new colour and sent balsamic odours to mingle with the crisp, icy air. Dr. Schmidt drew a long breath.

"Mein Gott!" he exclaimed, "you Montrealers have reason to be proud of this!"

"There is a spot which you must see—my favourite of all. It lies in a copse which in summer is a mass of green; and which in winter is a sort of snowy den, curtained from the keenest winds and furnished with tree stumps where a weary body may rest. We have yet an hour before darkness falls in which we may thresh out the mystery of Theodora. Come, my friend, let us go on."

Cold and clear, chill and threatening, night began to descend as the two men pushed in silence along a snowy path which led up the steep hillside and into the murmuring woods.

"To return to Theodora!" said Father Munn, at length. "The sheer beauty and glory of the day seems to make intelligent speech impossible. Yet you must give me the sum total of your investigations, and the decision at which you have arrived."

"And I shall. To put the matter in a nutshell, Theodora's cure lies ready to my hand—as sure as anything of that sort can be; as effective and as im-

mediate. I lack one element, however, for want of which the cure may be worse than the remedy. When I can lay my hand on that——”

“Explain, won’t you?”

“I shall try. In a word, then, there is but one way to probe Theodora’s inmost soul; and that is by means of hypnotism. But that means I hesitate to try.”

“Why?”

“It is a dangerous experiment. There is the possibility that Theodora, in her transitional stage from hallucination to normality, may become a mental slave and subject to anyone who establishes power of that sort over her. I confess that it is a risk which I hesitate to run. Yet time is short. Her present state of mind is dangerous.”

“She dwells constantly on her condition, I know. Since Aubrey’s death she is quite changed. By the way, what do you think of that?”

“What do I think? I think that her—call it what you will—astral body—subliminal self in the form of an apparition—wandering soul—appeared to Aubrey full of rage and hate; and that Aubrey, waking from a troubled sleep in which he had been haunted by dreams of an avenging Witch who killed with a glance, saw what must have been a sufficiently terrifying apparition under any circumstances. Having already received strongly the suggestion that such an appearance would kill him, it is not wonderful that he instantly died.”

“You fully credit the tales of apparitions, then?”

“I cannot refuse to do so in the face of attested

facts. It is well known that when experiments have been made deliberately people have succeeded in appearing to persons at a distance. Or say that they so impressed their images on these persons' brains that the latter believed that they saw them; it comes to much the same thing. Without doubt Theodora impressed such an image upon that unfortunate woman's brain—that Mrs. Somers; and without doubt Mrs. Somers died afterwards from her fear of Theodora and of her murderous propensities."

"Can such things be?"

"Ay, and others more marvellous. We are still, as Newton put it, children wandering by the ocean of life and picking up pebbles. Who can say what powers might not be ours could we but grasp them! Think of the martyrs whom the axe failed to kill! at the touch of whose bodies the oil that was to torture would not boil!"

"Yes. But, as Thackeray rather unkindly points out, these miracles, though spectacular, were of little benefit to the martyrs; as if the head did not come off at the first chop it always did at the fourth; and though the oil would not boil on Monday it never failed to boil on Tuesday. But I suppose the principle is the same. Something in them, in the martyrs, almost prevented death. Could not such a fact, though, be ascribed to purely natural laws such as some defect in the oil, some quality in the metal of the axe?"

"Undoubtedly; and, if so, then to other natural laws which we do not as yet even dimly guess at. All law is natural. But to return to Theodora—you see my

difficulty. Under hypnotism she could be probed and understood; then, when the root of her hallucination was reached, counter suggestions might be freely given. I believe that much of her condition is prenatal; yet I also know, by something which the mother told me, that all is not. But where to find the proper hypnotist! It must, you see, be some one of known probity, great delicacy, thorough understanding of the situation, and considerable skill."

"I thought you could hypnotise, yourself?"

"Yes; but there are reasons why I hesitate to undertake the case, alone."

"Would unusual skill be required to hypnotise Theodora?"

"No; ordinary skill. People who can hypnotise as she undoubtedly can are easily hypnotised, especially by some one in sympathy with them. It is the rest that is difficult."

"Could I—suppose my skill were sufficient—fill the other requirements?"

"You!" exclaimed Dr. Schmidt in amazement.

"Why, my dear Munn, what do you know of such matters?"

"Much. As a young man I attained surprising success along those lines. When I took Holy Orders my bishop begged me to give it up. I promised, reserving the right to break the promise if I saw fit. The bishop had been most kind to me and, as his prejudices in such directions were strong, I with an effort stopped all tampering with the psychical. Also, in accordance with my promise, I made no mention of my skill. The

time has come to break this promise. If I can be of any use to you you may command me."

"My dear Munn! You are the very person on whom my choice would have fallen had I thought it possible that you possessed the power. It is arranged then. Nothing could be more satisfactory. We shall call on Mrs. Carne to-night, and arrange a meeting with Theodora to-morrow, if possible."

"Would you tell her beforehand?"

"No. History teaches us that we must be wary in dealing with what we do not fully understand. Some of the most atrocious crimes in history—some of the most inexplicable happenings—are the direct result of the action of one mind on another. Anyone whose subconscious self is so ungoverned by the conscious as is Theodora's is peculiarly prone to become demented—a saviour like Joan of Arc, or a fiend like Bloody Mary. I do not myself believe that it would be best for you to use a direct influence upon her unless absolutely necessary. It would not be well if she on awakening from a trance retained a subconscious impression of reliance on you, and dependence on your will. I am asking you to use your skill only as a last resort. Above all things, we wish to make her an independent entity, freed from hallucination or slavish fears."

"Undoubtedly."

"Therefore it will be best to try the experiment of giving her a crystal ball, and letting her put herself into the hypnotic condition. A hypnotic patient—that is, a person who is easily influenced by hypnosis—can be thrown into a trance by being forced to stare for

an indefinite length of time at a fixed object. We shall try this. In order to aid the hypnosis, you might suggest to her that you have magnetised the ball."

"Not I. Let us not begin this work of aiding a distressed fellow-being by telling her an unnecessary lie."

The scientist shrugged his shoulders good-naturedly. "I agree," he replied, "I agree to anything. Let us give her my crystal and ask her to look steadily at it. That will be enough. She will know that I have used it in experiments and that will give sufficient suggestion of the unusual to rivet her attention."

"You puzzle me, Schmidt. You appear to have so much faith in these things. Not only in what is already proved, but also in the possibility of so much more that no one else as far as I know suggests. You show the utmost faith in all that Miss Carne, for instance, believes; of course you place a different interpretation on her actions from the popular one; but still you assume that her wildest imaginings are founded on fact. It interests me. I believe that if to-day some one told you that the girl had imitated the sorceresses of old in making an image of some enemy and causing that enemy to waste away—I believe you would have some explanation of the fact—would begin to show me, in all seriousness, that this enemy had begun to waste away."

Dr. Schmidt stared at the other for a moment behind his blue glasses.

"Odd! Most odd!" he commented, "I have been wondering whether suggestion has ever caused Theodora to try the experiment. If she had tried it, she

would doubtless have attained some success. Only yesterday I was thinking of that very point."

"Are you serious?"

"I am serious. I can give you gospel and text for my belief that, given a highly suggestible patient, it is possible to torture a mannikin in the certainty that the human being whom it resembles will feel the hurt. The thing has been actually done. In the 'Times' of Dec. 28, 1892, we have the account of an experiment which took place in Dr. Luys' clinic where the hypnotising was done by an amateur. This man made a roughly constructed figure, suggested to the patient that it was herself, put it out of her sight and began to play with it. When he pinched its neck she felt the pinch and screamed; when he tickled the soles of its feet she could hardly keep still. The 'Times' is, you will allow, a fairly credible authority; and Dr. Luys, who had that famous clinic in Paris, a reliable witness. No doubt the mass of legend concerning the maiming and torturing of wax figures which affected the beings whom they resembled had its origin in fact. There is nothing I have yet found, however wild, which is not rooted in some truth: no folk-lore, no legend, no superstition. Who is it that said, 'There are difficulties about everything but eating pancakes and he is the greatest fool of all who declares that he will not believe what he cannot understand'?"

"You are certainly an illuminating companion. But it is growing dark and I want you to see my woodland nook."

They had reached the summit of the hill and stood

among the pines. Before plunging among the fastnesses, they turned and looked once more at the panorama at their feet.

The day died gloriously. Fields, hills, pine trees, wavered in the waning light. In the trembling pink and amber of the west glittered one large and brilliant star, herald of Night and Sleep. A solemn vagueness lay on the waiting world.

Then the moon's pearl deepened to amber and the breezes cut more sharply. The men stirred and looked away.

"We have just time," said Father Munn. "Push aside those bushes, will you? and we shall see my snowy bower, surrounded by leafless trees and sighing branches. Ah, if you could but see it in June! Hallo! What—what is this?"

A low cry smote upon the air—the cry of a woman, half disappointed, half dismayed. There was something so unexpected, so wild, so strange about the cry that they stood spellbound for a moment. Then, with one accord, they broke hastily through the bushes.

Crouching on the snow was a desolate, grey figure. A face looked up at them—a wild, white face, illumined by burning eyes. They gazed at it dismayed, and neither spoke.

Night had fallen now. The snow was lighted only by the stars and by the ghostly moon. The pines huddled closely together as though seeking relief from the cold and the loneliness. Remote, dreary and threatening were the wild hills. The ground was white and

cold; a mortal chill seemed to pass from it to them as they stood watching.

It was the woman who spoke first.

"You?" she said.

The sound of her voice broke the spell which had fallen on the two men and they hastened to her side.

"What—what are you doing here, Theodora?" exclaimed Father Munn.

"I have come here to die," she answered dully. "It seems I cannot even die in peace. You will of course prevent me—and you can."

"You do not know what you are saying—you cannot! Have you forgotten your poor mother?"

"I have forgotten nothing. You may save your words. I shall not kill myself now because I do not wish to involve you in my death. If you are going home, I shall go with you. Please do not waste words."

"Your decision is final?" It was Dr. Schmidt who spoke.

"Final."

She sprang to her feet with the curious elastic grace which characterised her, and mechanically shook a little snow from her fur cloak.

"Please do not question me," she observed with a little hard laugh, "as to my methods of suicide or my reasons for departing this life. The first do not concern you; the second you probably know."

"I know both," answered Dr. Schmidt. "The first are both practicable and painless; the second are absurd."

She looked at him for a moment, startled.

"May I ask why, when you could so easily die in your bed by the same methods, you should conceive the idea of dying on the mountain top?" he asked evenly.

She laughed again unpleasantly. "Oh we all have our whims! I love the open—the open and the woods and the stars and the vastness of the sky. I wanted to die comfortably like a wild thing, stretched on the snow, staring into the stars, far far away from the distressing stinging humans—away where I could neither do nor receive harm. But you have deprived me of the pleasure of that lonely peaceful death. You have dragged me back to life—for a little longer time. I could have killed myself before you could have prevented me—but what then? There would have been cries, adjurations, tears"—she shuddered—"prayers, perhaps. Who can say? I have not been able to live in peace with all my efforts, but I shall die in peace. Understand me!" she spoke, imperiously, "it is of no use for any of you to try to prevent me; for what I wish to do, I *will* do. You can only put obstacles in my way, which obstacles I shall sweep aside if I have to sweep you both out of existence first. You understand me?"

"I understand you," said Schmidt placidly. Father Munn did not speak.

"Then let us say no more." She relapsed into a cold proud silence. Schmidt walked by her side pondering.

"You have uttered no empty threat, young woman,"

he observed at last. "I know well that you could sweep us both out of existence if you wished. Also you could swallow the poison which you carry in your hand——"

"How did you know?"

"It is my business to observe. You clenched that hand instinctively when we first parted the bushes. I understand poisons. You have a painless pellet there, I make no doubt. Also—I do not wish you to interrupt, Munn!—also I believe in the right of the individual to leave this earth when he has had enough of it. You may leave this earth unhindered by me—be quiet, Munn!—when I am sure that you wish to leave it."

"I wish to leave it here and now."

"We all wish that we were dead at times. It is an idiosyncrasy peculiar to the genus homo. I wished that I was dead last week because I had indigestion; my landlady's baby daughter wished she was dead yesterday because her mother would not allow her to set herself on fire with matches; and our priestly friend here wished that he was dead, thirty years ago, because a certain woman was. Yet we are alive, all three, and glad to be alive. Will you grant me one small favour?"

"Probably not."

"I have information that will interest you greatly—information about yourself which you do not suspect. Will you postpone your death until to-morrow night? If you will promise this, and will promise to listen to what Father Munn and I have to tell you, I shall

promise, in my turn, to do nothing to upset your plans to-morrow night—if you then wish to die.”

She was silent.

“On the other hand I need not point out to a young woman of your sagacity that we can do much to annoy you and to prevent your dying in peace. Of course you could kill us both in time; but it might take a little time and perhaps more material means than you have yet had resource to. A woman who so deeply regrets unpremeditated murders cannot wish to add premeditated murders——”

She gave a little strangled cry.

“You know?”

“I know. Poor child! I have no blame for you. You are not to be held accountable. But it can all be stopped very simply. You will promise to remain in this world of matter till to-morrow evening? It is a little thing.”

“Yes.” She spoke in a low voice. “But I am so unspeakably tired. It is hard to put off rest for another twenty-four hours.”

“Oh! If it were rest! But it would not be. You must know that. To each his task; and if you shirk, extra time.”

“Here is Father Munn,” he went on. “Poor Father Munn! He has been working for you—working to bring you peace and happiness. Will you throw it away because you are tired?”

“Oh!” she cried in a stifled voice. “Oh, yes—if he wishes it—I cannot refuse. I shall do what you ask.”

“It is well. We shall wait on you to-morrow at

three. Your mother too must be present. It is my desire. Ah! we are nearing home. It is late, so with your permission we shall just see you to your door and say good-night. One word in your ear: what you are dreading will not happen. You will not visit either Father Munn or me to-night; and—another word—if you did it would have no effect on either of us. We cannot be killed that way. So sleep peacefully; and remember that I am thinking of you and that Father Munn is praying for you. Good-night.”

“If I had not given her that suggestion,” he remarked quietly as they turned away, “she would have stayed awake all night, for fear of wandering and doing harm. It was not necessary. Besides, I have given her something to think of, which is always well. You will dine with me to-night, Munn?”

CHAPTER XXII

FULL CIRCLE

"The Wheel is come full circle."

—KING LEAR.

A CURIOUS group!" said Dr. Schmidt, gazing about the Waite library meditatively. "Doctor, priest and mother! Representatives of the three most powerful agencies for good and evil in the world. Ten minutes yet before we can expect Miss Theodora! Is there anything that I can tell you, Mrs. Carne?"

The woman's white lips moved dumbly.

"You are nervous. It is natural; but, I assure you, quite unnecessary. Your daughter will be relieved of her obsessions and you of yours. Ah, you start! You did not know that you had obsessions, did you?"

She shook her head and looked at him uncomprehendingly.

"Your obsessions, madam, are threefold. First, you do not believe in my skill; second, you do not believe in your daughter's humanity; third—and most important—you do not believe in the goodness of the God whom you profess to worship."

She started.

"Oh, Doctor, you are mistaken. I have never doubted that God is good. Only—His ways are sometimes hard to understand."

"Madam, you have credited God with the creation of diabolical beings for the express purpose of plaguing the human race. St. Dunstan himself was not more superstitious. You have thought that your innocent, conscientious, and afflicted daughter was one of these; you have allowed this belief to poison your life and hers. You are not so impious as Cotton Mather, but you are not far behind him. So! You take me seriously? That is what I wanted; to rouse you from your apathy. Now tell me; what was it that you wished to ask me?"

"You—you spoke of the subliminal self; of curing my daughter by bringing her subliminal self to the surface and causing it to tell what, if anything, had caused what you call her hallucinations."

"Yes."

"By the subliminal self you mean what we call the subconscious mind, do you not? That which we have in common with the animals?"

"Yes."

"Do you think that you can explain to me exactly what you mean to do? In what way you think that you can effect a cure?"

"Very easily. First then; you must remember that the subconscious mind remembers all. Nothing is forgotten except by the conscious mind. Now the subconscious mind receives many impressions long before the conscious mind is able to reason about

them. You may remember that Rizzio was stabbed before Mary, Queen of Scots? Her son, James the First, was born soon after and never could endure the sight of steel. Can you see why?"

"Surely you cannot mean that the subconscious mind received an impression before the birth of the child? An impression which it could not shake off?"

"Bravo, madam! You get my point exactly. It is probable that James never knew why the sight of steel shattered his nervous system; but we know. Why do you look so sad?"

"Because," she answered in a lower voice, "because I think that I see your meaning. You believe that my fear of the Witch, before Theodora was born—my fear of the Witch's powers and my constant gazing on the Witch's portrait—caused the condition of my little child—my only daughter. Oh, it is pitiful, pitiful! And yet—something tells me that you are right. And, if so,—then I am hopeless." She buried her face in her hands and broke into low, strangled sobs.

"Hush, madam, hush! You have grasped only one half of my meaning—not that! It is true that in all probability your horror of the Witch and of the Witch's face made a first impression on the subconscious mind of the unborn infant. But I believe that that impression of itself was comparatively slight. The greater part of the mischief was done afterwards."

"Oh no, Doctor. How could that be? Have you forgotten what I told you of her childhood? Of the

age at which we first saw the fatal effect which the Word had upon her?"

"I have forgotten nothing. And, madam," Dr. Schmidt spoke slowly, "I must tell you frankly that when I first heard your tale—the first part of your tale—I had very little hope. But by probing and questioning I discovered one fact of such overwhelming importance that I immediately left for New York in order to consult with colleagues there and to find out if their views agreed with mine. With all the verdict was the same."

"And the verdict was?"

"That Miss Carne's case was not necessarily incurable."

"But, Doctor,"—Mrs. Carne's brow was knotted in perplexity, "you say that *I* gave you the saving information?"

"You."

"And it was——?"

"Mrs. Carne," he spoke impressively, "have you forgotten that when your child was three years of age, able to speak a little and understand much of what was said before her, your husband, in a fit of rage, *made use of the Sacred Name in her presence with no ill results?*"

With a smothered exclamation Mrs. Carne sprang to her feet.

"It is true!" she cried, trembling. "It is true! How blind I have been. You think then——"

"I believe that whatever caused your daughter's strange obsession was something which occurred be-

tween the ages of three and three and a half. It shall be my task to discover what."

Mrs. Carne gazed at him with a white and quivering face.

"How?" she managed to ejaculate.

"By placing her in a condition of hypnosis and by dragging her subconscious memories to the surface—exploring the obscure and hidden regions of her subconscious mind. All experiences are hidden there and can be revealed in a dozen different ways. I shall try first the crystal." He reached for a small parcel which lay beside him on the table and slowly unwrapped it as he spoke. "I shall require her to stare into this while at the same time Father Munn will silently give her the suggestion to sleep. Presently the fatigue of the optic nerves caused by prolonged staring at a glittering surface will induce the mesmeric condition. That is provided she is susceptible to such influences. With most people three to five minutes is necessary. With Miss Carne I will wager that one will prove sufficient."

"Why?"

"Because anyone so peculiarly dominated by the subconscious as she is should prove an easy subject. Besides she has the hypnotic faculty herself and evidently possesses clairvoyant faculties of no mean order—witness her reading your mind as she has so often done, and impressing her will on you and others from a distance."

Mrs. Carne put her hand to her forehead.

"It is marvellous," she said helplessly. "One can-

not credit it. And you believe then that when Theodora is hypnotised she will tell you what has caused her—her——”

“Her hallucinations? Yes.”

“And if you are mistaken—if she is not susceptible to hypnotism—what then?”

“I shall be much disappointed. But there are other means—not so rapid, so safe, or so pleasant—of inducing the temporary lulling of the conscious mind and the activity of the subconscious.”

“For instance?”

“Well—with your permission and hers I should as a last resource try certain drugs. You have, of course, read De Quincey’s ‘Confessions of an Opium-eater’?”

“Oh yes; it is here in the bookcase.”

“Ah—will you kindly hand it to me, madam?”

He turned the leaves rapidly.

“Listen to this, please. ‘The minutest incidents of childhood or forgotten scenes of later years were often revived. I could not be said to recollect them, for, had I been told of them when waking, I should not have been able to acknowledge them as my past experience.’” He closed the book and looked at her triumphantly. “There, madam, is the testimony of a man who had never heard of the subconscious mind and who had no idea that he was both giving a description of its powers and suggesting a means of awakening it. Still do not think for a moment that I shall try anything of that kind unless all else fails. My own belief is that Miss Theodora will prove a favourable subject for hypnosis and that we shall dis-

cover in short order what strange blight lies at the roots of her being."

"And having discovered it—what then?"

"You mean, what will then be her condition?"

"Yes. Will she remember afterwards—that is supposing that she does reveal anything of which her conscious mind is ignorant?"

"I should say, certainly not, were it not that I have seen that memories from the hypnotic state do sometimes struggle up into the waking consciousness. But in this case she will, I hope, remember all, for I shall both give her the command to remember what she has told me of the cause for her terror and also the command to lose that terror."

Mrs. Carne was silent for some time.

"Then you do not think," she said at last with an effort, "that my condition before her birth had much to do with her state?"

"Not so much as I at first supposed. Undoubtedly, though, it had something. The fear which you felt of the strange face with the unfathomable eyes and the glittering hair was communicated to the unborn child; for she has told Father Munn that her earliest impression as she looked in the mirror was partly fear, partly fascination. As she grew older and observed this fear and fascination in the eyes of others as they looked at her, she 'knew,' as she expresses it, 'that she was not like other children.' It is also most significant that when she first read the account of the Witch and of her sinister beauty and malign influence she also 'knew' and could almost tell what was com-

ing as she turned the pages. Of course, she 'knew'; of course, it was all familiar to her. Had not you, her mother, impressed the whole history of the Witch and the fear of her on the unborn child? But beyond doubt, as I said before, something else—something sinister and powerful—reinforced these pre-natal impressions, and reinforced them before she was old enough to reason with or combat them. Such at least is the conclusion to which I have come, and which those whom I have consulted also hold. Ah! Miss Theodora's step if I am not mistaken. Now we shall see!"

"One moment, Doctor!" Mrs. Carne leaned forward and spoke quickly. "Wonderful and illuminating as your explanations have been, there is one thing which they have not covered—Theodora's effect on others. How do you account for that?"

Dr. Schmidt laughed tolerantly.

"My dear lady! Theodora believed herself to be a supernatural being cursed with demoniacal powers. You believed it; all who surrounded her in childhood believed it. Is it wonderful that she conveyed to the subconscious minds of others that with which her own subconscious mind was filled? Do you remember Joan of Arc? Did not she, an ignorant village girl, hypnotise a whole nation into believing her what she believed herself to be? Do not we to-day in these 'prosaic matter-of-fact times,' see countless thousands following any man who thoroughly believes himself to be a saint, a sorcerer, or a genius? Nothing convinces like conviction. Any fool can make other fools think he is

what he says he is—provided he believes it himself. Have I explained?"

Mrs. Carne drew a long breath. Her eyes shone.

"I have a living proof of your theory before me," she said smiling. "You believe so thoroughly in your power of curing Theodora that you even inspire me with hope. God help you, Doctor! And God grant that you succeed!"

"Amen," said Father Munn, solemnly; and on the word Theodora entered.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE GREAT GULF

"The act of hypnotism produces a sort of cleft between the waking conscious mind, and the great gulf of the subconscious."

—BORIS SIDIS.

SHE entered slowly, trailing the skirts which always seemed longer and more graceful than the skirts of other women, greeted the two men quietly, then stood for a moment staring into the fire. Dr. Schmidt spoke briskly.

"We are glad to see you, Miss Theodora. You will sit here if you please. You are willing, are you not, to trust yourself to us? You know that we shall do all in our power to help you?"

"Yes."

"Do you wish to know anything of our plans for you?"

"I am not interested. I shall do what you wish, because I promised that I would; but do not burden me with explanations. You cannot help me; I am doomed."

"Ah! But I do not think that you will say so an hour hence. Sit here please, facing me."

She obeyed languidly.

"What now please?"

"Take this little ball in your hands—so! Look at it. That is right. You need not think about it or do anything at all but just look carelessly at it as you are looking now. Father Munn will sit beside you on the sofa—so! Mrs. Carne! Where you are, if you please!"

In silence Theodora gazed into the depths of the crystal; in silence the others gazed at Theodora. Father Munn's lips moved mechanically. Presently her face changed; her eyes dropped and closed; she leaned heavily against the cushions of the couch where she was sitting.

"She will answer now," said Dr. Schmidt in a low voice replete with triumph and satisfaction. "With your permission, Father Munn, I shall now question her. Theodora!"

"Yes."

"Are you asleep?"

"I am asleep."

"Will you answer me?"

"I shall answer you."

"Who are you?"

She trembled and made as though to rise, breathing quickly and heavily.

"Do you know who you are?"

"Yes."

"Why do you not answer?"

"I do not want to," she answered faintly.

"You do not want to?"

"Oh, no."

"Why not?"

Again she struggled and showed signs of agitation and distaste.

"I—I—it is too horrible."

"You see!" said Dr. Schmidt in a low voice to Father Munn. "You hear! Theodora!"

"Yes."

"Why is it horrible to tell me who you are?"

"You know!" she cried in accents of despair and fright.

"I want you to tell me."

"It is because—because——"

"A moment!"

Dr. Schmidt bent towards her.

"Forget," he said quietly, "that you wish to keep some things secret. Forget that there is anything horrible in your life which you do not wish to disclose. Feel the desire to tell me all—all. You understand?"

"Yes."

"You are no longer afraid?"

"No."

"You will answer me fully?"

"Yes."

"Who are you?"

"I am a doomed soul."

"Are you not Theodora Carne?"

"I am called Theodora Carne. But I am the lost soul who was known in a former life as the Witch of Carne."

A stifled exclamation broke from Mrs. Carne. Dr. Schmidt turned on her sternly.

"Madam, you must control yourself or leave the room," he said. "This is ghastly earnest. We are hearing, for the first time, what your daughter's inmost thoughts about herself are. Presently we shall know the cause of these thoughts. But you must not interrupt. Theodora!"

"Yes."

"Are you sure that you are the Witch?"

"Yes."

"Has this knowledge made you happy?"

A low moan broke from her livid lips.

"Answer!"

"No! No! No!"

"It has made you wretched?"

"Yes."

"Why then do you believe it?"

"Because I must."

"Think carefully. What made you first believe that you were the Witch?"

"I do not know."

"You know. Try hard. You can remember."

She struggled for speech.

"It was something disagreeable," he suggested, watching her intently. "What was it?"

Again she made an effort.

"It was very long ago," she murmured unwillingly.

"Yes. Very long ago?"

"When I was a small child."

"A small child. What was your age?"

Swiftly and without hesitation she answered him.
"Three years two months and seven days."

A gleam of triumph shot into the doctor's eyes as he half turned toward Mrs. Carne.

"Theodora," he said, very deliberately, "you are not the Witch of Carne. Do you hear me?"

"Yes."

"You are not the Witch of Carne. Who are you?"

She stuttered for a moment.

"Who are you?"

"The—the Witch of Carne."

"You are not the Witch of Carne. Do you hear me? Not the Witch! Not a witch of any sort! Father Munn!"

"Yes, Schmidt!"

"Tell her the same thing, will you, in different language. You see how deeply rooted the obsession is."

"Theodora, my poor child," said the priest very gently, "you are not a witch. You do not really think that you——"

She interrupted him with a snarl like that of a wild beast; her fingers stiffened like claws; a slight foam gathered on her lips.

"I am the Witch!" she asserted, menacing him with her eyes, "I am the Witch! I am——"

"Theodora!" shouted Schmidt, suddenly, with a roar like that of an angry lion, "Did I not tell you that you were *not* the Witch?"

She shrank from him in terror.

"How dare you contradict me? On awakening you

will remember that you are not the Witch, have never been the Witch, that such an idea is absurd, that I will not allow you to harbour such a superstition for a moment. You understand me?"

"Yes," she muttered cowering.

"Never forget, Munn," said Dr. Schmidt, in a low voice, "the extreme slavishness and servility of the subconscious self. Speak to it pleasantly and it will resist you; order it like a dog and it will comply with any request. Ask it in a hesitating way to hand you a paper and it will refuse; command it authoritatively to eat sand for sugar, to assassinate its best friend—nay, to cut off its own right hand; and it will obey you literally."

"Do you believe that it is only a subconscious mind?" said Mrs. Carne in a low and quivering voice. "It seems to me like an evil spirit—a demon from Hades—usurping a human body."

"Madam, the subconscious mind has frequently averred itself to be a devil fresh escaped from hell; an evil spirit recently released from the flesh; nay, the Father of Evil himself. Yet there seems good reason to believe that all these terrible announcements are made by portions of disintegrated personality, and that they need not be taken very seriously. When I have given this woman's subliminal self some fresh commands you will see how implicitly it will obey them. Consider how faithfully it has obeyed the suggestions made by unskilled performers when your daughter was but three years of age! It will obey me just as faithfully. Have no fear!"

"Theodora," he continued.

"Yes."

"I command you to tell me fully—fully, remember! what occurred when you were three years two months and seven days old."

The lovely face underwent a sinister and horrible change; the brilliant eyes half closed, giving a suggestion of failing sight indicative of age; the features contracted; the very skin seemed to parch and wither before their eyes. She mumbled something in a strange voice.

"What is that that you are saying?" asked Dr. Schmidt, watching her attentively. His face showed none of the horror which Father Munn's and Mrs. Carne's expressed.

"Coom wi' me, Deborah, girl! I'll take ye where I promised. Coom; bring the child. She'll none hurt."

Dr. Schmidt turned swiftly as Mrs. Carne emitted a smothered gasp.

"Do you recognise that voice—that face?" he asked tersely.

"Nancy! Old Nancy!" she whispered terrified. "But—*she has been dead for fifteen years and more!*"

"I think she is still dead," answered Schmidt smiling. "Do not be afraid. Theodora is obeying my command to tell *fully* what alarmed her when she was three years of age. If she told us only the words that she heard and the name of the person who uttered them she would not be obeying me literally. For you see that evidently it was the old woman's face and

manner that alarmed her, rather than the words she used."

"Have you ever heard of a similar case—where the subconscious self mimicked a dead person?" asked Father Munn in an awed voice.

"Such cases are uncommon but by no means unknown. The subconscious self, on being told that it is—say, James Smith,—will mimic James Smith's personality so completely that an actor of the highest standing could not improve on the impersonation. This is more unusual—this species of mimicry—but natural when you consider the terms of my command. Now, Theodora! Who was it that spoke just now?"

"Nancy, the nurse," she answered in her usual voice. Her face on the conclusion of her former speech had resumed its youthful and classic lines.

"Nancy, the nurse. And this speech of hers alarmed you? Why?"

"She looked at me strangely!"

"What alarmed you next?"

"A portrait—the portrait of myself."

"How did you know that it was yourself?"

"I knew the face before they told me that it was I——"

"Ah!" Dr. Schmidt was unable to restrain an ejaculation of triumph. "They told you that it was you."

"That it was the Witch of Carne."

"And you knew that the Witch of Carne was yourself? Why?"

"Not then."

"When?"

"When Nancy had finished telling Deborah the story."

"What story?"

Again the beautiful face underwent a horrible change. In a voice cracked with age, harsh with misuse, Theodora repeated word for word a garbled account of the legend of the Witch.

"Did this terrify you?"

"Vaguely. I was not happy."

"Can you tell us why you were not happy?"

"Deborah shuddered as Nancy talked and this frightened me. Besides Nancy looked at me in a dreadful way. And the picture frightened me."

"But all this did not make you believe that you were the Witch, with the Witch's powers and the Witch's curse hanging over you, to be removed only by a man who loved you better than himself?"

"No."

"What then did?"

A shriek rang forth in a voice that was not Nancy's. A frightened, stupid face, giving a suggestion of prominent teeth and bovine eyes, stuck itself almost into the doctor's, a shrill untutored voice quavered in high hysterical notes:

"Help us and save us! Help us and save us! It's the Witch come to life—the child's the Witch—and me that's been nursin' of her—it's the same face!"—the voice rose higher and higher with uncontrolled, bovine terror—"the same face! The face of the Witch! God

help us! She'll put the curse on us all! Look at her now with them black eyes staring out——"

Theodora's face changed again. With the rapidity of lightning it turned old and haggard and threatening.

"Stop your noise, you fool!" the old voice hissed. "Stop your noise! Any fool could see what that child is. Didn't I know when I saw the eyes of her in the cradle? Doesn't her own mother know that's scared to be with her in the dark? If you vally your life, don't you speak that word before her."

"What word?" shuddered the other voice.

"The word 'God.' She'll die if you do! She'll disappear in hell——"

"Why do you stop?" asked Dr. Schmidt with interest.

"Deborah dropped me on the floor and I lost consciousness."

"Why did you lose consciousness?"

"Because the nurse—Nancy—said that I should."

"She said that you would die if you heard the Word, did she not?"

"Yes."

"Why then do you faint instead of dying when you hear the Word?"

"I—I almost die."

"Probably her vitality is too strong to respond more than partially to so evil a suggestion," whispered Father Munn.

Dr. Schmidt shrugged his shoulders. "It is a point for discussion and research," he said. "We are cer-

tainly unearthing wonders. I am glad to have two witnesses. Tell me, Theodora, would you faint now if you were to hear that Word?"

"Yes." Her voice rose almost to a shriek; her eyes brightened with terror.

"Yet you repeated it just now, without shrinking; why was that?"

"I do not know."

"The subconscious mind," explained Dr. Schmidt, turning rapidly to the others, "is excessively stupid in certain respects. It will take any suggestion, however absurd or difficult, but it cannot reason about the information given it. Nancy did not tell her that she would be in danger of death when she mentioned that Word, therefore you see she *mentioned* It without panic. Yet it would be dangerous and might be fatal for her to *hear* It while the suggestion remains unaltered. Theodora!"

"Yes."

"Nancy was wrong. That Word will have no ill effect upon you. You can hear It as often as you like without ill effects. You hear me?"

"Yes."

"You believe me?"

She struggled for a moment. "Not quite," she said, unwillingly.

"Why not?"

"I have nearly died so often from hearing It."

"And why have you not quite died?"

The answer came calmly.

"Because my heart is so strong, my nerves so steady,

that they recover from the deadly shock and I struggle back to life."

"Extraordinary!" muttered the doctor doubtfully. "Well, it is time that this ended. Theodora!"

"Yes."

"The Word will not hurt you," he thundered suddenly. "I give you the command to forget that you have been told that it will hurt you. I command you to listen without ill results when I say that WORD. You understand?"

"Yes," she muttered, cowering. "Do not—do not be angry."

"I shall not be angry if you obey me. But you will obey me!" he continued, speaking once more in a threatening manner. "You will obey me absolutely. You will listen to that Word just as you would listen to the word, 'Door.' Now—I am going to repeat it. Are you ready?"

"Yes."

"God."

"Yes."

"You felt no ill effects?"

"None."

"You will never feel any ill effects again; never again as long as you live. Do you understand?"

"Yes."

Dr. Schmidt drew a long breath. "Now," he said, "you may continue. What happened when you fainted?"

"Deborah screamed and ran away. Nancy, too, left

me and called a footman. He carried me to the nursery and laid me on a bed."

"How much did you remember of this when you awoke?"

"Nothing."

"You have never consciously remembered all this from that day?"

"Never."

"Yet subconsciously the impression has remained with you ever since?"

"Always."

"Tell me now who you are."

Her face contracted and whitened. She mumbled something.

"Speak so that I can hear. Who are you?"

"The—the Witch of Carne."

"You are Theodora Carne," he shouted fiercely. "Theodora Carne, Theodora Carne. You never have been, never will be, and are not the Witch of Carne. Now tell me who you are!"

"Theodora Carne."

"You will not forget that?"

"No."

"You will not imagine that you can be both Theodora Carne and the Witch of Carne?"

"No."

"Very good!" Dr. Schmidt drew a long sigh and mopped his forehead.

"You may sleep," he said quietly.

At the word she dropped on the cushions and re-

lapsed into unconsciousness. Dr. Schmidt leaned back with an air of relief.

"I was obliged to stop," he said, "I was becoming exhausted. It is seldom that a first suggestion is so persistent. It was necessary to terrify her before I could uproot the delusion. Of course the suggestion has been reinforced so often and so steadily that it is doubly obstinate. However, I hope that now the rest will be comparatively easy."

"Doctor," said Mrs. Carne trembling, "what I have just seen terrifies me. Theodora was an infant when she saw the nurses, and I have never known her to mimic anyone in her life. How is it possible for her to mimic them so perfectly?"

"Because she did not know that she was mimicking. For the time being she was first Nancy, then Deborah. The subconscious mind is so plastic that it can be transformed at will. Having no fixed personality it can assume any character instantaneously. Not only that, but it often gets into possession of all the ideas and associations that belong to the person whom it is impersonating and remembers all its deeds and thoughts."

"How do you explain that?"

"I cannot. As far as I know, no one has attempted to explain it. With your permission, I shall now close my eyes for five minutes before questioning Theodora again. One moment though! Did either of you notice that when Theodora was impersonating Nancy she made her say something that is not mentioned in any of the legends—nay, that is absolutely contra-

dicted by one story? What! Neither of you did notice? And yet I thought it the most illuminating detail of the whole business. It has always puzzled me that though the legend speaks of the Witch weeping over her sons' cradles, and though Mrs. Carne believes that Theodora wept as an infant, yet Theodora herself avows that she is unable to weep. How account for that? But she accounted when she impersonated Nancy and made her tell young Deborah that the Witch could not weep, try as she might! You see! Nancy's own invention regarding the Witch was taken as seriously by Theodora's subliminal self as the inventions that had come down through the centuries. Now I really shall rest for a few moments."

Mrs. Carne uttered an exclamation.

"I see! And Nancy in telling the story did not say that the word 'death' would have an ill effect; only the Other Word. How wonderful! And how extraordinary that none of us ever thought of that until you pointed it out to me at our interview."

Dr. Schmidt smiled.

"Yes; it was that slight but very significant detail that confirmed me in my belief that something had occurred to Theodora, after the age of three, to account for these unusual manifestations."

CHAPTER XXIV.

A FLOOD OF LIGHT

CHOR. Thy fame, prophetic virgin, we have heard,
We know thy skill.

CASSANDRA. The oracle no more shall shroud its visage
Beneath a veil . . . but, like the sun,
Shall burst upon you in a flood of light.
—*Agamemnon*: ÆSCHYLUS.

CAN you describe to us, Theodora, your sensations on fainting?"

"Horror, a vision of an awful form with blazing eyes, rushing of waters, deep darkness and a sensation of falling, falling, falling into some bottomless pit out of which I shall never again emerge."

"This is terrible to you?"

"Terrible. I could never speak of it till now."

"Now you have no longer fear or hesitation?"

"None."

"Good. Are you in danger of death at these times?"

"In imminent danger."

"Tell me again why you have never died under these attacks?"

"Because my health is so perfect that a shock which would kill a feebler organism only tortures mine."

"You have always believed that you were the Witch?"

"Yes."

"You do not believe it now?"

"No."

"Because of this belief you have tried to find salvation in a human love. Is it not so?"

"Yes."

"That is the only reason for your many engagements?"

She was silent.

"Answer!"

"Must I answer?"

"You must answer."

"It was not the only reason for the last."

"Ah, the last. You mean Dr. Hale?"

Her face altered and darkened. She bowed silently.

"You love him then? though you have resented his treatment of you so bitterly?"

She stirred restlessly; scalding tears oozed slowly from beneath her closed lashes. Father Munn's face contracted with pity; but Mrs. Carne leaned eagerly forward murmuring—

"What! she can weep!"

"You love him?"

"I love him. I hate what he has done; but I love him."

"Yet he has rejected you? despised you?"

She shrank and shivered. "Don't!" she implored.

"You care as much as that?"

"Yes."

"Is it wise to care so much for a man who is apparently selfish and hard?"

"No. One loves because one must."

"Did you think your love for him quite hopeless that you made ready to die at the first rebuff?"

"I saw that it was not strong enough to save me."

"Oh—the superstition! We shall attend to that later. Now, Theodora, listen to this! Dr. Hale deserted you because he believed you to be practically insane; when he finds you are cured of your hallucination he will probably want you again. What will you do?"

"Marry him."

"Will it make you happy to marry him?"

"I do not know," she answered sorrowfully. "I shall not be able to forget—I shall always remember that he cared more for his pride than for me. I shall never be able to respect, to look up to him."

"Why should you look up to him? Can you not love him without admiring him? If he were your child you would love him whether he were weak or strong, would you not? Can you not then love him, knowing him to be rather hard and narrow?"

"Oh, yes!" she cried in a transport of delight. "Thank you, thank you. I see what you mean. He shall be my child; I will guard him from all trouble. I see! I can still love him. Oh, I am happy! And he will come back to me?"

"I think I can promise that," said Schmidt soberly.

"He will come back to you. The fact of her believing that," he said to the others, half-apologetically, "will draw the man with bands of steel. I have no fear."

"I shall see him and tell him everything," put in Father Munn anxiously. "If he has the heart of a man——"

"Oh that does not enter in. He has, or has had, a very strong infatuation for this young woman and these things do not change in a day—that is, not as a rule. Of course I can quite sympathise with his dislike of abnormality, but after a time, if he still admires her, and if he sees that this obsession has completely passed and that in all other respects she is as sane as he, why——"

"And is it in this way that our wonderful Theodora is to be married?" inquired Father Munn, flushing with indignation.

"Not unless she wishes it," returned the other coolly. "Don't be a fool, Munn. We must take things as they are. If she cares more than he she must pay the penalty; if he cares more than she, he does. It is all quite simple—not a question of the relative value of individuals to the world but a question of their relative value to one another. She could have fifty men of equal importance who would think themselves amazingly lucky to get her; but if she sets her heart on a rather callous, estimable sort of chap, and won't look at any other—why, she must take him on his own terms, that's all. I wonder if she has any lurking idea that she needs his love to save her? She seems so

extraordinarily happy at the idea of his coming back to her."

"May I give her a few suggestions, Dr. Schmidt?" asked Father Munn in a low voice.

"Most certainly."

The priest leaned forward, regarding the sleeping girl earnestly.

"My poor Theodora," he began in a gentle, soothing voice, "my poor child! You have placed such a narrow, mistaken meaning on the old prophecy. Suppose that you had been the Witch to be redeemed only by love—what then? Is the love of a young man for a young woman the only love that counts in the sight of God? Ah, no. Were there no others who loved you and whose love might have saved you from your doom? Your mother, for instance?"

"She does not love me," said Theodora clearly. "She is afraid of me—ashamed of me. In her heart she wishes that I had never been born. She does her duty by me. That is all."

"God forgive me, she speaks the truth. I thought no one knew it but myself."

"Perhaps she does not know it when she is conscious," said Father Munn thoughtfully. "The subliminal self is a strange thing. Theodora, my child, is there no other love that would be strong enough to save you, supposing that your mother loved you less than herself? Think."

"You!" She almost screamed the word.

"Yes. Do you not think that the love of a priest for his flock, of a philanthropist for mankind, is

stronger and purer and more unselfish—therefore greater—than the love of a man for his wife, except in rare instances? Do you not know that it is?”

“I know. I see. Therefore—therefore—tell me!”

“Therefore you, supposing that you were the Witch, could still be saved from doom. But even if you had been the Witch you did not need that love to save you. Divine love has already saved you; you are God’s child, heritor of the ages. Why should you fear death and damnation? They are evil dreams, dreamed by man in his barbaric stage. Death is transition; damnation, a lie. Will you remember that?”

“Oh, wonderful! Yes, I shall remember it.”

“Good. Now, let me ask once more—are you the Witch?”

“I—do not know. I—yes, I think——”

Dr. Schmidt uttered an exclamation of impatience and amazement. She stopped and looked uncertainly at him.

“No,” she enunciated faintly, “I am not the Witch.”

The two men looked at one another.

“How the hallucination persists!” exclaimed the scientist half discouraged. “Of course all these years of auto-hypnotism cannot be shaken in a moment.”

“You see then why I gave her these new suggestions. I feared that her deeply rooted belief might haunt her waking moments once your influence was removed. Therefore I thought it well to destroy if possible the belief in the Witch’s doom. Now with your permission I shall try another experiment.”

“By all means.”

"Theodora, you remember what the Witch was in her last incarnation—beautiful, fascinating, powerful—like you. She had not her husband's love, it is true, but she had everything else—money, power, beauty, the love and admiration of numbers of other men, rank, fascination, charm. What did she do with these gifts?"

"She wasted them."

"She wasted them. She used her powers, which were vast and wonderful, wrongly. She used them to terrify, to astonish, to win selfish ends—even, it is said, to hurt and kill. Why do you shudder? She was not, is not, you."

"Oh! I am afraid!"

"You need not be. Do you believe that when the Witch came to earth once more to work out her redemption—do you believe that she would still be dowered with the powers she abused, the gifts she wasted?"

She was silent now, listening.

"You see that she would not. The occult law works inexorably. What is given is given for a purpose; if the purpose is not fulfilled the gift is withdrawn. Would the Witch then be allowed to return to earth with the beauty she misused, the powers she misapplied? and, with them, to redeem her soul?"

"Would she not?"

Father Munn spoke impressively.

"Theodora, the Witch, if allowed to return to earth, would come in the guise of a plain, unattractive woman whom no man would notice, whom no woman would

envy. She would have neither rank, beauty, money, nor power of any sort."

"How then would she work out her redemption?"

"In silence, in poverty, in helplessness, in sorrow—losing perhaps the few people she cared for, denied perhaps the love of husband or child—yet doing her duty painfully, steadily, without praise or help or reward. Perhaps after many years of sorrow and privation gaining just enough worldly comfort to give to others who might not even thank her for giving it. Find such an one, Theodora, and if there is any truth in the legend you will find the re-incarnated 'Witch of Carne.'"

Here a curious thing happened. Theodora sat erect and cried out with a loud, astonished, and almost terrified voice,—

"Cousin Amy!"

Then something slowly died out of her face; that subtle, mysterious aloofness from the world of matter—that curious, haunting Oriental suggestion—that look which had terrified and alienated even while it fascinated—faded and changed and died. Like a rose her face bloomed and softened. Almost could the wondering awed on-lookers believe that they watched at the birth of a new soul.

"Cousin Amy!" she cried, again. "Not I! Cousin Amy!"

"Ah!" she continued, her face illumined by a passionate recognition and pity, "how can I have been so blind? Poor, plain, charmless, unloved; married to a man she came to hate, seeing the man she loved

indifferent to her, losing the child she loved so blindly, seeing youth depart, possessing neither happiness, friends, nor comfort. Then gaining enough money in a hopeless and desolate middle age to carry out plans of kindness to others. She is the Witch. How can we have been so blind? All the mysterious deeds of love done by an unknown hand in the city—all, all done by her!" Her face clouded for a moment. "I do not quite see," she muttered, "she is the Witch, yet—yet—the Witch's soul was to be redeemed by one who loved her unselfishly." She sprang to her feet. "I know!" she cried in a voice like the peal of a clarion. "I know! Her dead child! He loved her when all others shrank from her; to him she was neither plain nor charmless; hers was the first and dearest face he saw on earth; hers the last and sweetest face that bent over him in his coffin. Her child!" She sank unconscious to the ground.

For a moment they stared at her dumfounded. Then Father Munn gently lifted her to the couch and turned to his colleague.

"The cure," he said, "is effected. But——"

"Amazing!" ejaculated Dr. Schmidt.

"How," asked Father Munn in amaze, "how did she know that Mrs. Waite had a child? I never heard of it."

"Nor I," said Mrs. Carne faintly. "Perhaps a delusion!"

"You do not think so, Mrs. Carne."

"The subliminal self!" muttered Dr. Schmidt, "does it know all? Or only guess at truth? and speak with-

out authority? If it should be! And is it not possible? Is it not more logical that the Witch, having wasted her beauty, her occult powers, should come to earth to work out her redemption without them, than that she should re-appear, clothed with marvellous beauty, with compelling magnetism? Without doubt it was partly pre-natal—the girl's belief! But this last—her apparent recognition of the Witch in the human semblance of a humble, retiring relative—how wonderful, if true! And—could it not be true? supposing that such things did happen? For Mrs. Waite, as truly as Theodora, is a daughter of the House of Carne——”

“It is, I think, an absurd belief,” said Father Munn in a low voice. “But is it not strange how the subconscious mind will work out a theory for itself, once it is given a powerful suggestion? Ah, Schmidt, do you not fear to bring Theodora back to the work-a-day world? How dreadful if all we have done is useless! if the witchly suggestion is so strong as to dominate her waking consciousness, despite our efforts!”

“I have small fear,” returned the other; but his eyes were anxious.

“Give her the command to wake if you please, Father Munn!”

The latter silently made the hypnotic passes. Theodora opened her great eyes slowly and smiled.

“Ah!” she cried, stretching her arms above her head with an expression of relief and rapture. “What has happened? What have you all been doing? I feel as if I had just been born again; as if some hor-

rible weight had been rolled off my soul. *Mother!*" She flung herself into her mother's outstretched arms.

A silence fell; it was broken at last by the clergyman, who raised wet eyes to Theodora's transfigured face, murmuring,

"God be thanked!"

THE END

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